

The Cuban Missile Crisis: Considering its Place in Cold War History



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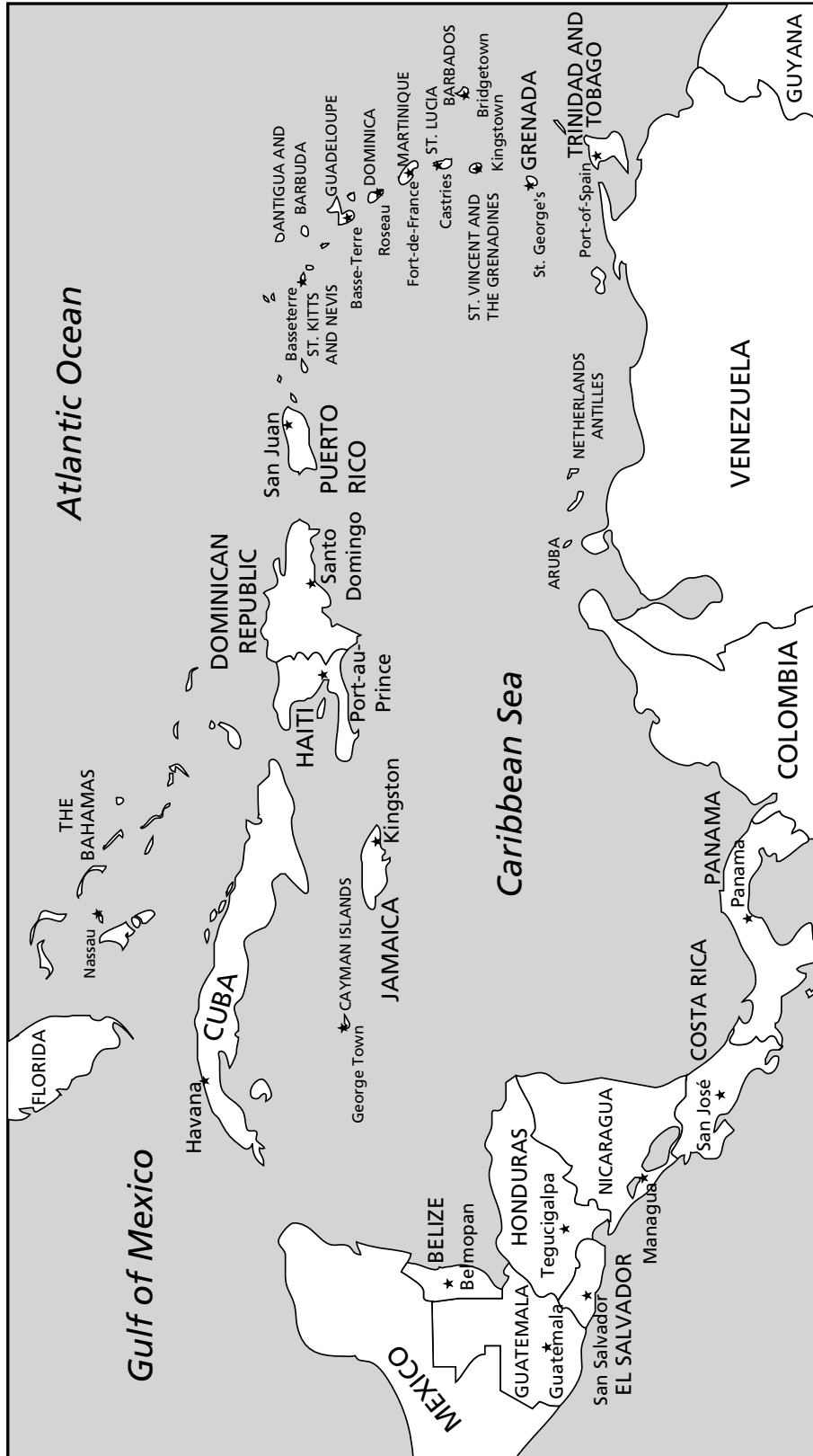
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The Caribbean and Central America



Introduction: October 16, 1962

On October 16, 1962, President John F. Kennedy confronted an earth-shattering revelation: the Soviet Union had placed missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons on the island of Cuba, just ninety miles from the United States.

Tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States had been high since the late 1940s. For every U.S. president since Truman, this ideological standoff—known as the Cold War—had shaped foreign and domestic policy. Kennedy had worried for months about Soviet intentions toward West Berlin and in Southeast Asia, but this was much closer to home. Kennedy realized that, if launched, these missiles could hit the United States in minutes. The Cold War seemed about to boil over.

Cuba presented a thorny problem for the president. Cuba's leader, Fidel Castro, welcomed in the United States with open arms just a few years before, had recently aligned himself with the Soviet Union.

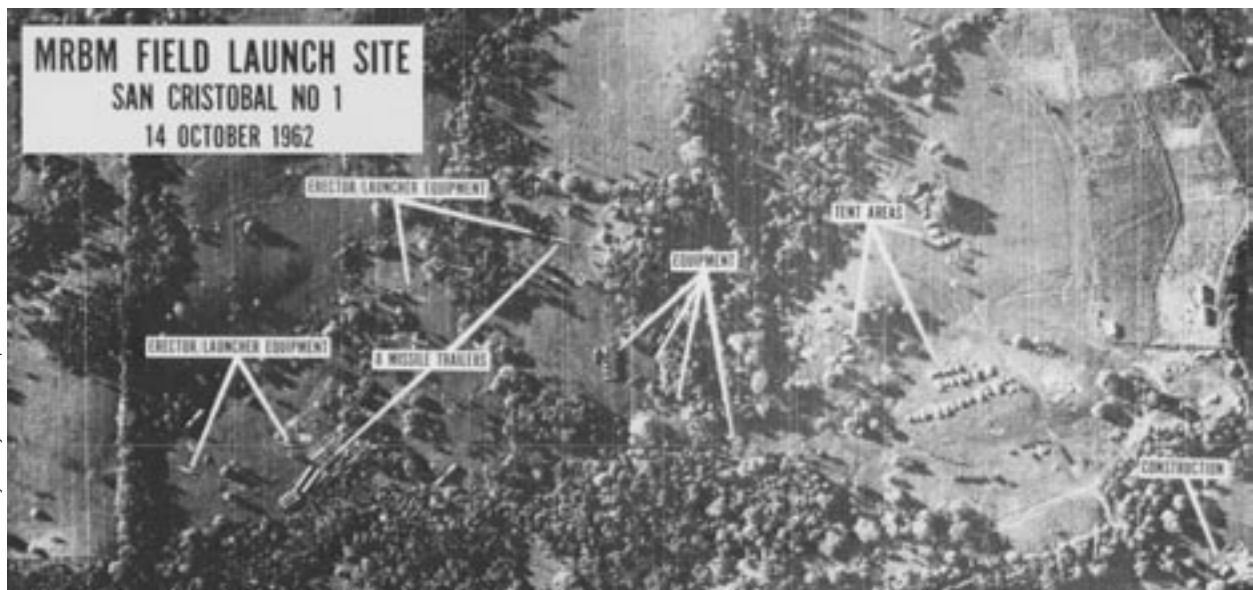
Many Americans felt that Castro's revolution was a rejection of the U.S. effort to bring American skills and values to the region. The island had become a flashpoint for U.S. anxiety about the world. In an attempt to overthrow Castro, Kennedy had authorized

a CIA-sponsored invasion of Cuba in 1961. Known as the Bay of Pigs invasion, it was a disastrous failure.

The president had met with Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev the previous year in an effort to improve relations between the two nuclear powers but with little success. Khrushchev, convinced that the Soviet Union was a growing power and emboldened by advances in Soviet rocket technology, saw little reason for compromise.

Nonetheless, Khrushchev had promised to do nothing that might affect the upcoming U.S. elections. Furthermore, he had promised not to place offensive weapons in Cuba. Now Kennedy wondered what Khrushchev was doing and how he should respond.

In these readings, you will explore the circumstances that brought the United States to the brink of nuclear war in 1962. You will explore the history of U.S. relations with Cuba—the country to challenge U.S. domination of the Caribbean and Central America most boldly. You will then grapple with the same question President Kennedy pondered: how should the United States respond to the Soviet missiles in Cuba? An epilogue reviews the outcome of the missile crisis.



John F. Kennedy Library. Used with permission.

U.S. experts first learned of Soviet missile installations in Cuba by examining this reconnaissance photograph.

Part I: From Colonialism to Statehood

Perhaps nowhere in the world have U.S. actions left a greater impact than in the Caribbean and Central America. The size and strength of the United States have cast an enormous shadow over the small states of the region. The people of the Caribbean and Central America have often found themselves swept up in the currents of U.S. history.

How did the Caribbean and Central America become entangled in U.S. history?

When Americans developed a taste for bananas, coffee, sugar, and other products of the tropics, American businessmen moved quickly to set up huge plantations in the Caribbean and Central America. When the needs of U.S. trade and defense required a shorter ocean route between the Atlantic and the Pacific, the United States stepped in to build the Panama Canal in the early 1900s. And when Soviet expansion began to worry U.S. leaders after World War II, the United States provided large amounts of foreign aid to support friendly governments in the region.

What role did European explorers have in the region?

European explorers made their first contact with the New World in the Caribbean and Central America. From the beginning, the encounter favored the Europeans. In Central America, the efforts of the Spanish empire to colonize the region met resistance from a well-organized society dominated by Mayan culture. By 1543, however, the Spanish had imposed control, uniting an area from what is today southern Mexico to Panama under a single jurisdiction.

In 1823, after the Spanish empire crumbled in Mexico and South America, the United Provinces of Central America was formed. The federation disintegrated by 1838, giving rise to the independent states of Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala. (Panama, another Central American country, broke away from Colombia in 1903.)

In the Caribbean, Spain overwhelmed the native populations in the 1500s. In the next two centuries, the British, French, and Dutch joined the Spanish in colonizing the cluster of islands that stretches from the tip of Florida to the coast of Venezuela. Sugar cane became the most profitable crop of the islands, and African slaves the European colonizers imported worked on the huge plantations.

Political independence came very slowly to the region. A successful slave revolt in Haiti defeated the French colonial powers in 1804, but for much of the Caribbean, independence was not achieved until the twentieth century. Unlike Mexico, many countries of the Caribbean and Central America lacked a unifying sense of nationhood. Their small size and economic weakness left them vulnerable to pressures from their larger neighbors, especially the United States.

What role did Manifest Destiny play in the region?

From the earliest days of the republic, Americans felt that the United States was a unique force for good in the world. Many believed that the values of American democracy and individual liberty were destined to sweep across the continent and perhaps the entire Western Hemisphere. Believers in Manifest Destiny, a term first coined in the 1840s by a New York journalist, held that the territorial expansion of the United States was part of God's plan to spread the American experiment in self-government.

Manifest Destiny served as a guiding principle of U.S. foreign policy during the Mexican-American War, which was ignited in 1846 by a dispute over the boundary of Texas. After U.S. forces captured Mexico City the following year, Mexico was forced to give up not only its claims to Texas but also territories that now comprise the American Southwest and California. The peace settlement with Mexico, however, did not satisfy some in Washington. Twelve of fifty-two senators ultimately op-

posed the treaty, arguing that the United States should annex all of Mexico.

By the mid-1800s, the present boundaries of the United States had been drawn except for Alaska and Hawaii. With expansion to the west closed, attention turned toward the Caribbean and Central America. In the years leading up to the Civil War, Southerners sought to expand the plantation system to Cuba and Nicaragua, and in the process strengthen their position against the North. Cuba was especially attractive to the South, because the economy was already dominated by sugar, coffee, and tobacco plantations using the labor of African slaves. In 1854, President Franklin Pierce expressed the U.S. desire to obtain Cuba from Spain. Pierce's declaration, known as the Ostend Manifesto, asserted that the United States had a reasonable right to buy Cuba for a fair price or even use force if the offer were refused.

An American Empire

The North's victory in the Civil War put an end to the South's plans of expansion and spurred the emergence of the United States as an industrial giant. More than ever, Americans felt their country had a special mission to promote democratic values in the world. The late nineteenth century was also a time of fierce competition among the major powers of Europe. Their colonial empires in Asia and Africa required naval power to protect them. Britain maintained the largest navy during the 1800s, but Germany was rapidly closing the gap. In this atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion, Americans feared that the European nations would extend their struggle to the Western Hemisphere.

What was the purpose of the Monroe Doctrine?

The Monroe Doctrine had long served as a warning for Europeans to stay out of the Americas. When President James Monroe originally proclaimed it in 1823, the United States depended on Britain to enforce the policy. By the end of the century, however, new British

settlements in Central America and a boundary dispute between Venezuela and the British colony of Guiana raised U.S. concerns about British plans. Moreover, the French and Germans were seeking to increase their influence in the Caribbean and Central America.

Among the colonial powers of Europe, the United States most resented Spain. Not only did the Spanish rule Cuba and Puerto Rico with a heavy hand, but many Americans saw the Spanish monarchy as backward and corrupt.

Cuban attempts to overthrow Spain's control attracted widespread support among Americans during the nineteenth century. The Cuban poet and patriot, José Martí, organized and unified the drive for Cuban independence from New York City. When a new revolt began in 1895, American sympathies again went out to the Cubans fighting for independence. Martí returned to Cuba and was killed in battle. (Martí remains a hero to Cubans to this day.) Spanish efforts to crush the rebellion in 1896 raised the stakes further. A Spanish army of 200,000 men attacked villages where support for the revolt was strong and herded hundreds of thousands of peasants into fortified towns. The Spanish also burned crops and slaughtered thousands of farm animals in hopes of destroying the roots of the uprising.

Why did the United States declare war on Spain in 1898?

By 1898, the war in Cuba had stalemated. The Spanish held the cities while the Cuban rebels controlled the countryside. Meanwhile, newspapers in the United States inflamed the public with details of Spanish brutality. "Blood on the roadsides, blood in the fields, blood on the doorsteps, blood, blood, blood," wrote the *New York World*. When the U.S. battleship *Maine* exploded mysteriously in Havana harbor in February 1898, the press rushed to blame the Spanish. President William McKinley could not resist the mounting public pressure. Even though Spain was ready to accept U.S. demands, he asked Congress to declare war.

McKinley's war goals, however, differed from the popular call to intervene on the side of Cuban independence. McKinley believed that the United States should take military action to end the conflict and establish a stable government. But Congress feared that McKinley's real intent was to make Cuba a permanent U.S. possession. While giving President McKinley the authority to enter the war in 1898, Congress also passed an amendment requiring the United States to grant Cuba self-government once the Spanish colonial army was defeated.

What was the result of the Spanish-American War?

The Spanish-American War lasted only four months and ended with a decisive victory for the United States. Spain and the United States concluded a peace treaty that turned over to U.S. control the Spanish colonies of Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines, as well as Cuba. As Americans quickly discov-

ered, governing an empire was much more difficult than conquering one. Particularly in Cuba, the conclusion of the Spanish-American War failed to lay the foundation for a peaceful future. Many Cubans had already invested thirty years of their lives into the independence movement when U.S. troops arrived in 1898. Their struggle had united supporters of independence throughout the island. As might be expected, Cuban nationalists were deeply disappointed when the United States negotiated an end to Spanish rule without their participation. Many felt they had merely traded one colonial power for another.

The U.S. military occupation of Cuba began in 1899. The United States provided benefits that the Cubans could not have provided for themselves. Americans brought their advanced technology and administrative expertise to the island. Roads and telegraph lines were built, finances reorganized, schools opened, sanitation improved, and yellow fever stamped out. At the same time, U.S. officials



A trainload of sugar cane in Cuba around the beginning of the twentieth century.

University of Miami Library. Used with permission.

sought to create a political system that would closely follow Washington's guidance. Only 5 percent of Cuba's population had voting rights. Nonetheless, elections in 1900 produced an assembly that strongly favored immediate independence for Cuba. The McKinley administration now found itself in a quandary. White House policymakers wanted to protect U.S. business and security interests in Cuba, but the American public expected Washington to establish a strong democratic government on the island.

Why did the Platt Amendment anger Cubans?

U.S. concerns about the future of Cuba were ultimately settled, but in Washington rather than Cuba. Under a plan crafted largely by the U.S. State Department, Cuba was to receive independence only after accepting a number of limitations. The plan, known as the Platt Amendment, gave the United States the right to oversee the Cuban economy, veto international commitments, and intervene whenever necessary "for the protection of life, property, and individual liberty." The United States was also allowed to build a naval base on the southeastern tip of the island at Guantanamo Bay. News of the proposed amendment sparked angry demonstrations and protests in Cuba, but the McKinley administration insisted that the Platt Amendment was the price Cubans would have to pay for ending the U.S. military occupation of their island. In 1901, the amendment passed the Cuban assembly by one vote.

The Platt Amendment opened the door to greater American investment in Cuba's economy. By 1928, American companies produced 75 percent of Cuba's sugar—the island's leading crop. Cubans who had fought in the independence struggle found few opportunities in an economy dominated by Americans and recent immigrants from Spain. They came to resent the alliance between foreign businesses and wealthy Cuban plantation owners. Their frustration would later emerge as a powerful force in Cuban politics.

Why did the United States construct the Panama Canal?

The American experience in Cuba proved to be the first of many U.S. involvements in the Caribbean and Central America. The construction of the Panama Canal in the early 1900s was among the boldest. Interest in a canal across the isthmus of Central America had steadily grown since the United States had expanded across the continent to the Pacific Ocean in 1848. Events during the Spanish-American War had demonstrated the military importance of a canal. For example, the U.S. cruiser *Oregon* had taken nearly ten weeks to round Cape Horn and join the battle against the Spanish navy.

The Panama Canal drew the United States closer to the Caribbean and Central America. As American economic and military power increased in the first decades of the 1900s, U.S. leaders began to view the region as their country's backyard. The Caribbean and Central America became both an area of vital national interest and a testing ground for cultivating American values.

What was the "Roosevelt Corollary"?

Theodore Roosevelt set the stage for increased U.S. involvement during his State of the Union address to Congress in 1904 by adding an additional idea to the Monroe Doctrine. In what came to be known as the Roosevelt Corollary, he warned that the United States would act as an "international police power" to maintain stability in the Western Hemisphere. Roosevelt soon put his pledge into practice, sending U.S. troops to Cuba in 1906 after supporters of the Cuban Liberal Party rose up in opposition to the re-election of the Conservative Party president.

World War I raised new concerns about the security of the Caribbean and Central America. The commander of the U.S. Marine Corps was convinced that Germany had provoked chaos in Haiti and Santo Domingo (now the Dominican Republic) in order to set up military bases on the island. President Woodrow Wilson ordered troops into the two countries in 1914 and 1916 respectively. Haiti became a U.S.

protectorate (a country that is watched over and partly controlled by a stronger one). A U.S. military government was installed in Santo Domingo.

U.S. involvement in Nicaragua left a particularly lasting impact. Originally, U.S. troops landed in 1910 to back a pro-U.S. government. The force soon grew to three thousand soldiers, and the Nicaraguan government increasingly came under the management of U.S. experts and advisers. Opponents of U.S. domination in Nicaragua turned to guerrilla warfare in 1927. The United States committed six thousand soldiers against a small rebel army led by Augusto César Sandino, and eighteen U.S. warplanes conducted history's first dive-bombing attacks. The guerrillas, however, moved too quickly and the terrain proved too difficult for the Americans to gain a decisive victory. Frustrated, the United States withdrew its forces in 1933. Before leaving, the Americans set up the Nicaraguan National Guard to police the country. The force soon became the private army of its commander, Anastasio Somoza. In 1934, Somoza lured Sandino to a meeting in Nicaragua's capital with a promise of peace talks, and then assassinated him. By 1937, Somoza had toppled Nicaragua's elected leader and installed himself as president. With control of the National Guard, Somoza intimidated his opponents and built the framework of a family dynasty that ran Nicaragua until 1979.

What was the role of the United Fruit Company in the Caribbean?

Overall, the American presence in the Caribbean and Central America during the early 1900s was more economic than military. The United Fruit Company, operating banana



President Theodore Roosevelt is depicted as “the world’s constable.”

Louis Dalrymple, 1905, in *Judge* magazine.

plantations throughout the region, became the largest agricultural enterprise in the world. Along with its rival, Standard Fruit, the company built highways, railroads, ports, and communications facilities. Schools, hospitals, and housing were constructed for the workers.

American businesses linked the economies of the region to the outside world, boosted the production of export crops, and created thousands of jobs. Transportation and communication improvements opened up new possibilities for development. Meanwhile, U.S. officials worked toward establishing sound financial institutions and effective government.

At the same time, the U.S. presence had negative consequences. American companies in the Caribbean and Central America meddled in local politics and relied on the U.S. military to support their interests. In Cuba, 60 percent of the property in the countryside belonged to Americans by 1905. At one United Fruit plantation there, even the post office and twenty armed soldiers were based on company land. In Honduras, an American commanded the army, and the U.S. dollar was legal currency. Economic development often proved imbalanced and smothered local initiative. Most of Central America's highways and

United Fruit Company

The story of the United Fruit Company is intertwined with the history of Central America and the Caribbean. The company originated in the late 1800s, a time when leaders of the region were seeking to create new economic links with the outside world. In Costa Rica, the government offered an American businessman, Minor Keith, 800,000 acres to build a railroad from the capital to the Atlantic Ocean. Keith planted bananas on much of his land and merged with another trading firm to form the United Fruit Company in 1899. United Fruit constructed railroads and port facilities up and down the Caribbean coast of Central America. The company also helped governments control tropical diseases.

United Fruit soon became known as “The Octopus” for its domination of much of Central America and the Caribbean. By the 1920s, the company not only controlled the rail system, ports, and communications of the region, but also played an important role in political affairs. In Honduras, presidents could not be elected without United Fruit support, while in Guatemala the government relied on the company for loans. During the 1970s, banana-producing countries tried to assert their economic independence. They complained that exporting countries received only 17 cents of every dollar spent on bananas and demanded a greater share of the profits. In response, United Brands (the successor of United Fruit) joined with other exporting giants in threatening to close down their operations. Countries in the region recognized that they could not afford to lose markets for their products in North America. The emergence of new industries in the Caribbean and Central America has loosened the economic hold of Chiquita Brands International (the successor of United Brands), but the company remains a powerful force to this day.

railroads connected the plantations to Caribbean ports but did not serve national capitals. The emphasis on export crops left countries dependent on a single product. During the Depression of the 1930s, for example, a fall in the price of Cuban sugar from twenty-two cents a pound to half a cent pushed millions of Cubans into desperate poverty.

How did President Franklin D. Roosevelt change U.S. relations with Latin America?

President Franklin D. Roosevelt brought changes to U.S. relations with Latin America. Under his “Good Neighbor Policy,” Roosevelt repealed the Platt Amendment, offered gov-

ernment loans to Latin American countries, and pledged not to intervene in the region. The policy withstood a major challenge in 1938, when Mexico took over the property of American oil companies in the country. Despite pressure from business interests to send in troops, Roosevelt negotiated a settlement with Mexico that provided payment to the oil companies.

But Roosevelt’s new approach to Latin America would be overtaken by a rapidly changing world. The beginning of the Second World War launched a series of events that would force profound changes in the foreign policy of the United States.

Part II: Cold War Tension

World War II transformed U.S. foreign policy, including American relations with the Caribbean and Central America. The explosion of atomic bombs over Japan and the conclusion of the war in 1945 left the United States the most powerful country on earth. Soon after the defeat of Nazi Germany, however, the United States faced a new challenge from its former ally, the Soviet Union. Despite their enormous war losses, the Soviets had built up an army of twelve million soldiers to defeat Nazi Germany.

What did Winston Churchill mean by the “Iron Curtain”?

The alliance of World War II quickly dissolved once the fighting ended. By February 1946, Soviet Premier Stalin predicted that the conflict between communism and capitalism would lead to a new war. Meanwhile, his troops remained firmly in place throughout much of Eastern Europe. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill had warned his U.S. allies about the Soviet threat even while World War II was raging. In 1946, after losing the prime minister’s post, he became more convinced that Stalin was seeking to divide Europe in two. In March, Churchill presented his concerns to an American audience in Fulton, Missouri, that included a sympathetic President Harry Truman.

“From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest, and Sofia, all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere.”

—Winston Churchill

Why was containing the Soviet Union a priority for the United States after World War II?

By the late 1940s, the tension known as the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union had cast a shadow over international relations. The Soviets remained in Eastern Europe and imposed their rule. U.S. leaders feared that the Soviets would attempt to extend communist rule over the entire continent. Containing the influence of the Soviet Union and the spread of communism became the top priority of the United States. In March 1947, President Truman announced his intent to “support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressure.”

Known as the Truman Doctrine, the policy statement was linked to a request to Congress for military aid to Greece and Turkey. Although few Americans were deeply interested in the Greek civil war or Soviet territorial claims in Turkey, Americans increasingly viewed communist aggression as a serious menace.

What two policies were the basis for the Truman Doctrine?

The Truman Doctrine rested on two expensive U.S. commitments. In April 1948, Congress approved the European Recovery Program after lengthy debate. Better known as the Marshall Plan, the program was an economic aid package that invested \$12.5 billion (about \$100 billion in 2006 dollars) into the reconstruction of sixteen European states from 1948 to 1952. Although they were invited to participate, the Soviets refused U.S. assistance and barred their Eastern European satellites from accepting aid.

The United States also joined with ten countries of Western Europe and Canada in 1949 to form a military organization, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). By 1955, NATO had expanded to include thirteen European members, including West Germany and

“Are You Tryin’ to Start a War?”

John Fischetti. (c) 1958. Newspaper Enterprise Association, Inc. Used with permission.



Turkey. With the signing of the NATO Treaty, the United States committed itself to the defense of Western Europe and pledged for the first time in history to maintain a substantial U.S. troop presence overseas.

Why were Americans worried about the global political climate of the early 1950s?

The United States in 1950 was in many respects at its zenith in global power. The U.S. share of the world’s income was 52 percent. Americans held 49 percent of international financial reserves. The United States produced approximately half of the world’s oil and steel. And yet, many Americans were deeply worried by the international political climate.

International events in large part shaped the consensus that emerged around U.S. Cold War policies. In June 1948, the Soviets imposed a blockade on the western part of Berlin to unify the German capital under communism. (The United States, Britain, and France took control of West Berlin after the division of the city following the war.) With overland traffic cut off by the surrounding Soviet forces, the United States and its allies airlifted eight thousand tons of supplies daily to western Berlin. The Berlin blockade lasted almost a year until the Soviets backed down.

More ominous developments followed. In September 1949, the Soviets exploded their first atomic bomb. The next month, communists led by Mao Zedong won control of mainland China and joined Moscow in pressing for the spread of communism worldwide. In June 1950, communist North Korean forces invaded South Korea, drawing the United States into a three-year conflict that ended in a stalemate.

By the mid-1950s, U.S. leaders had given up on the idea that the frontier of communism in Eastern Europe could be rolled back by force. President Dwight D. Eisenhower rejected appeals that the United States respond militarily when the Soviets sent tanks into Hungary in 1956 to crush the independent-minded government there. Rather, U.S. leaders reluctantly accepted the Soviet sphere of influence in Hungary and elsewhere behind the “Iron Curtain.” At the same time, Eisenhower and his successors believed that the United States had no choice but to maintain its role as a military superpower.

How did Soviet nuclear weapons force the United States to rethink national security?

Moscow’s development of nuclear weapons forced American defense planners to devise a new approach to national security. Without a nuclear monopoly, Truman and Eisenhower bolstered the U.S. presence in Western Europe to deter Soviet aggression. The military built up U.S. conventional, or non-nuclear, forces. By 1955, the number of American troops in the region had reached 431,000, and over half of the U.S. military budget was earmarked for defending Europe. Meanwhile, American policymakers hoped to maintain their head start in the arms race. In 1947, Truman ordered that four hundred nuclear weapons be ready by 1953. Under Eisenhower, the doctrine of “massive retaliation” committed the United States to use nuclear weapons to counter a Soviet attack on Western Europe.

The Cold War in the Western Hemisphere

U.S. leaders were also determined to prevent communism from gaining a foothold in the Western Hemisphere. They believed that the establishment of a single communist regime would set off a chain reaction, toppling governments friendly to the United States one after the other. According to this theory, communism could eventually reach the U.S. border with Mexico.

The Cold War struggle with the Soviets caused the United States to be more concerned about stability in the Caribbean and Central America than democratic reform. The first example of this policy occurred in 1947, when the president of Nicaragua, Anastasio Somoza, refused to honor election results in his country. Instead, Somoza reclaimed power with the help of the Nicaraguan National Guard. For a few months, President Truman denied Somoza's regime official recognition, but in the end the United States resumed close relations with Nicaragua. The Truman administration worried that instability in the region would open the door to communist revolution.

What was the purpose of the Rio Pact?

That same year, the United States unified the Western Hemisphere in a mutual defense treaty known as the Rio Pact. The agreement, signed in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, called on the countries of Latin America to come to the aid of a neighbor under attack. The Rio Pact was one of Washington's first steps designed to enlist Latin America on the U.S. side in the Cold War. In 1948, Washington took the lead in forming the Organization of American States (OAS) to strengthen alliances within the Western Hemisphere further. The United States also signed military treaties with ten different countries in the region. Under these agreements, the United States supplied equipment and training to armies in Latin America, and the governments pledged to reduce trade with the Soviet bloc.

Why did the United States sponsor a military coup in Guatemala?

The United States saw another threat to its security in Guatemala. Since 1950, Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz had been pursuing an economic reform program. His government had confiscated the unplanted fields of large landowners and had divided the land among 100,000 peasant families. The United Fruit Company lost land under the reform and claimed Arbenz was a communist sympathizer. The United States grew particularly concerned when Guatemala received a shipment of weapons from communist Czechoslovakia in 1954. Many U.S. policy-makers feared that the Soviets were courting Guatemala to gain an ally in the region.

In response, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) began a secret operation to overthrow the Arbenz government. The CIA gave a few hundred Guatemalan exiles military training at a base in neighboring Honduras. It also paid pilots to conduct bombing raids on the Guatemalan capital to undermine the government's resolve. Meanwhile, CIA radio broadcasts convinced Arbenz that a huge rebel force was preparing to invade. In less than two months, the CIA campaign forced Arbenz to flee the country. Carlos Castillo, an army colonel friendly to the United States, replaced him in 1954.

Castillo returned the land of the United Fruit Company and signed a defense pact with the United States. From Washington's point of view, the overthrow of Arbenz had succeeded in removing a potentially troublesome regime. For Guatemala, however, the events of 1954 only deepened the country's divisions. Castillo himself was assassinated in 1957. In the years that followed, large landowners increasingly turned to the military to crush calls for land reform. By the 1960s, paramilitary squads were killing thousands of peasants, mostly Indians, in a desperate attempt to maintain the status quo. Within Latin America, U.S. policy received much of the blame for Guatemala's plight.

Why was Cuba a concern for the United States in the 1950s?

U.S. worries in the Caribbean and Central America, however, did not end with Arbenz. On the contrary, Cuba was an even bigger concern in the 1950s. Politically, Cuba had been fairly stable since Fulgencio Batista seized power from a reform-minded government in 1934. Washington supported Batista as a strongman who would maintain order on the island and not upset U.S. interests. Even after Batista's defeat in elections in 1944, Cuba remained close to the United States. At the same time, though, official corruption was mounting. Hope for reform suffered a setback when Batista staged a coup to take power in 1952. Few Cubans expected the Batista regime to tolerate democratic change in their country. As a result, resentment against the government grew during the 1950s.

Few Americans were aware of Cuba's political troubles. In the United States, Cuba was known best as a glamorous resort. A boom in tourism to the island began in the 1920s and reshaped Cuba's image. Cuba was associated with casinos, nightclubs, and tropical beaches.

American money helped provide Havana, Cuba's capital, with more Cadillacs per capita than any city in the world during the 1950s. But the wealth also brought problems to Cuba. By the 1950s, American organized crime was firmly established on the island, along with drugs and prostitution.

Economically, Cuba could claim one of the highest per capita incomes in Latin America. In reality, however, many Cubans could not find full-time employment, especially in the countryside. Meanwhile, many middle-class Cubans depended on expensive imports from the United States to maintain their lifestyle, which was far below the standard of their American neighbors. With inflation rising, prospects for the future were not reassuring. Cuba in the 1950s relied more than ever on the export of sugar. Price increases in the 1940s had brought prosperity to the island, but the ups and downs of the sugar market in the 1950s badly shook the economy.

The Castro Era

Opposition to Batista developed gradually in the 1950s. Most Cuban political parties gave up on the democratic process when Batista rigged elections in 1954. The next year, the police and army broke up student demonstrations. Seeing few alternatives, a handful of opponents to the regime turned to armed struggle. A young lawyer named Fidel Castro was one of the most noteworthy. The son of an impoverished Spanish immigrant who had become a wealthy landowner, Castro attended Cuba's top schools. Tall and athletic, he was even offered \$5,000 by the New York Giants to play professional baseball in the United States. Castro's true interest, however, was politics.

Castro first captured public attention with an almost suicidal attack on an army base in 1953. He hoped that a dramatic blow against the Batista regime would spark an insurrection throughout Cuba. The assault, however, failed to set off a larger uprising. Instead, most of Castro's nearly two hundred followers were killed, and Castro himself was jailed for two years. Sailing a small yacht from Mexico to

The New Good Neighbor Policy



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Cuba in 1956, Castro and eighty fellow revolutionaries launched another attack against Batista. Most were killed by Batista's forces before reaching shore. Without arms or supplies, the eighteen survivors of the landing straggled into Cuba's isolated eastern mountains. Far from the center of power, Castro began his guerrilla war by attacking outposts of the unpopular Rural Guard. Thousands of landless peasants joined the struggle against Batista in 1957 and 1958, especially after the government forced many villagers into military camps.

As Castro's movement gathered strength in the countryside, other opponents of Batista disrupted life in the cities. The rebels bombed government offices, cut power lines, and derailed trains. Batista responded with still greater violence and repression against those who challenged his rule. By 1958, even factions in the military and police were joining the opposition. In February of that year, Catholic bishops in Cuba called for a new government.

Why did U.S. public opinion turn against Batista?

Batista's human rights violations also turned U.S. opinion against him and led the United States to halt arms deliveries to Cuba. Facing opposition from almost every direction, Batista had little hope for survival. On January 1, 1959, he resigned and fled the country. Castro's forces quickly assumed the leadership of the revolutionary movement, and on January 8, Castro entered Havana.

In April 1959, The United States welcomed Castro, who spoke to large enthusiastic crowds at U.S. universities. Although Castro stated that he was against communism and dictatorship, U.S. government officials remained unsure of Castro's stance towards the Soviet Union. Nonetheless he was briefed by the CIA about U.S. perceptions of the Soviet threat and met with Vice-President Nixon.

“The one fact that we can be sure of is that he has those indefinable

qualities which make him a leader of men. Whatever we may think of him, he is going to be a great factor in the development of Cuba and very possibly in Latin American affairs generally. He has the power to lead.”

—Vice-President Richard M. Nixon

By the middle of 1959, the United States no longer felt unsure of Castro. Mindful of the long history of U.S. involvement in Cuba and Latin America, Castro increasingly viewed the United States as a threat. His government began taking American-owned property in Cuba without compensating the owners. He suppressed Cubans who were critical of him by exiling them or putting them in jail, and he became increasingly critical of the United States. Perhaps more important to the United States during the Cold War, Castro's speeches seemed to align him with the Soviet Union. Cuba increasingly came to be regarded as a base for communist subversion in the United States' backyard.

What role did Cuba and the Cold War play in the presidential election of 1960?

Candidates Senator John F. Kennedy and Vice-President Richard M. Nixon both tried to show that they would be better able to stand up to the Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. In fact, in their campaigns both candidates talked mostly about the Cold War and the competition with the Soviet Union. For example, they discussed a traditional subject of domestic politics—increasing economic growth—in the terms of the Cold War. Kennedy argued that increasing economic growth would allow the United States to win the arms race and to demonstrate capitalism's superiority over communism. Kennedy also harshly criticized Nixon and the Eisenhower administration for failing to support Cuban “freedom fighters” who wanted to return to Cuba and overthrow Castro.

However, Kennedy learned after his inauguration as president in January 1961 that the Eisenhower administration had planned an operation to overthrow Castro. Encour-

aged by their success in Guatemala in 1954, the CIA had trained fourteen hundred Cuban exiles to invade Cuba, march toward Havana, and start a rebellion against Castro. Kennedy worried that an invasion might cause Khrushchev to react militarily in Berlin or elsewhere. Nonetheless, Kennedy approved the invasion, with the provision that U.S. military forces not be used. The landing at the Bay of Pigs on April 17, 1961, was a complete failure and an embarrassment to the Kennedy administration. Castro's forces overwhelmed the invaders within days and forced them to surrender.

What were the consequences of the Bay of Pigs?

Kennedy took responsibility for the failure of the Bay of Pigs operation. Nonetheless, his unwillingness to commit U.S. military forces to the operation brought him criticism from staunch anti-communists and anti-Castro forces. Kennedy also realized that he had not listened to enough advisers nor had he taken enough time to consider the issues carefully.

The humiliating failure of the Bay of Pigs

nurtured a deep dislike for Castro in Kennedy, his brother, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, and his advisers. They authorized another set of CIA-sponsored operations. The operations, code-named Mongoose, included sabotage and assassination—all designed to get rid of Castro.

“The purpose of the program...is to bring about the replacement of the Castro regime with one more devoted to the true interests of the Cuban people and more acceptable to the United States in such a manner as to avoid any appearance of U.S. intervention.”

—CIA Memorandum

Why did Castro and Khrushchev believe the United States would invade Cuba?

The failure of the U.S.-sponsored landing at the Bay of Pigs in 1961 and Operation Mongoose convinced Fidel Castro that the United States would soon make another, more forceful attempt to attack Cuba. Next time, he

Washington vs. Havana

Much of the conflict between the United States and Cuba in the early 1960s took place far from public view, especially after the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion. In the United States, President Kennedy approved a secret campaign in the fall of 1961 to overthrow the Castro regime. Known as Operation Mongoose, the CIA directed the effort. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy summarized the intent of the plan: “My idea is to stir things up on the island with espionage, sabotage, general disorder, run and operated by Cubans themselves.” Through Operation Mongoose, the CIA and Cuban exiles worked to undermine the Cuban economy and focus popular anger against the Castro government. Some agents also tried to enlist organized crime leaders in a plot to assassinate Castro. One failed scheme centered on poison pills, which were smuggled into the kitchen of a hotel cafeteria where Castro often ate. Other plans featured deadly bacteria imbedded in Castro's skin-diving suit and cigars, a seashell packed with explosives, and a pen firing poisoned darts.

Castro's strategy against Washington took a different approach. Rather than striking directly against the United States, Castro jabbed at U.S. allies in Latin America. Until 1961, Cuba's most important weapon was propaganda. Castro stressed the need for revolution throughout the Western Hemisphere and claimed that the United States was blocking progress in the region. After the Bay of Pigs invasion, Cuba began giving revolutionary movements more active support. Cuba established a training school for guerrillas and Cuban military advisers. It sent arms to aid rebels in Guatemala in hopes of disrupting free elections. According to Castro, Cuba was only defending its revolution against the United States.

assumed, U.S. troops would lead the invasion. As a result, Castro believed that he needed to strengthen Cuba's defenses. To protect Cuba from the might of the United States, Castro turned to the other superpower, the Soviet Union. Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev had already threatened to respond if the United States intervened in Cuba. After the Bay of Pigs, he backed up his commitment to Cuba by supplying the Cuban military with sophisticated weapons. Soviet officers and technicians also arrived to teach Cuban soldiers the tactics of modern warfare.

How did the United States respond to Cuba's alliance with the Soviet Union?

The United States denounced Cuba's alliance with the Soviet Union as an affront to the principles of both the Rio Pact and the Monroe Doctrine. President Kennedy developed a two-pronged approach to pressure the Castro regime. On the one hand, he sought to promote economic growth and democratic reform in Latin America to provide an attractive alternative to Castro's revolution. On the other

hand, the United States led the campaign to expel Cuba from the Organization of American States (OAS) and organized a corps of counter-insurgency specialists to help Latin American leaders fight communist guerrilla movements.

By early 1962, the triangle of U.S.-Soviet-Cuban relations seemed to be pointing toward confrontation. Castro announced that he was a Marxist-Leninist and that Cuba was a communist state. To defend his revolutionary government against the United States, he relied on his Soviet allies to supply Cuba with arms. For their part, the Soviets readily built up Castro's arsenal. They hoped to use Cuba as a staging ground for extending their influence in the Western Hemisphere. Securing a strong communist Cuba located only ninety miles off the coast of Florida represented an important move for Moscow on the global chessboard. American policymakers saw the Soviet presence in Cuba as a threat to U.S. national security. Political pressure at home was mounting in 1962 for Kennedy to take action against Castro's revolution and the threat of communism in Latin America.

October 1962: The Moment of Decision

On October 14, 1962, an American U-2 reconnaissance aircraft flew over the province of San Cristobal in Cuba on a routine mission to gather data. The pictures the aircraft took of the ground, however, disclosed developments that were far from routine. The photos revealed Soviet efforts to install approximately forty nuclear missiles, each capable of devastating an American city.

Since Cuban leader Fidel Castro's first appeals to Moscow in 1960, U.S. officials had repeatedly warned the Soviets against attempting to put missiles in Cuba. The Soviets had assured the United States that they had no intention of giving the Cubans nuclear missiles. They pledged that Cuba would receive only non-nuclear weapons to defend the island from attack.

“There is no need for the Soviet Union to shift its weapons for the repulsion of aggression, for a retaliatory blow, to any other country, for instance Cuba. Our nuclear weapons are so

powerful in their explosive force and the Soviet Union has such powerful rockets to carry these nuclear warheads, that there is no need to search for sites for them beyond the boundaries of the Soviet Union.”

—TASS [Official press agency of the USSR]
September 11, 1962

The discovery of evidence that nuclear missiles had been sent to Cuba forced U.S. leaders to respond. The crisis that began when the reconnaissance photos were examined on October 15 was the most dangerous confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States of the fifteen-year-old Cold War.

Today, it is known to Americans as “the Cuban missile crisis,” to Soviets as “the Caribbean crisis,” and to Cubans as “the October crisis.” At no other time in history was U.S. policy in the Caribbean and Central America so dangerously entangled with U.S.-Soviet relations.



John F. Kennedy Library. Used with permission.

President Kennedy leads a session of ExComm during the missile crisis.

Kennedy's Critical Concerns

West Berlin and the Crisis

In 1958, the Soviet Union demanded a resolution to the divided status of Berlin. The Soviets argued that Berlin was in their occupation zone of Germany and should fall completely under their control. This prompted hundreds of thousands of East Germans to flee to the West through Berlin. To stem the flow, the Soviets put up a wall in August 1961 between the two halves of the city to keep East Germans from fleeing to West Germany.

During the missile crisis, many U.S. policymakers feared that Berlin again would become a point of conflict. They thought that the Soviets might demand that the United States leave Berlin in exchange for removing their missiles from Cuba. Another possibility was that the Soviets would counter a U.S. attack on Cuba with an attack on West Berlin, all the more likely considering that Soviet forces already surrounded the city. Such a move could have resulted in nuclear conflict because the United States had pledged to use nuclear weapons to defend West Germany and other NATO countries.

Jupiter Missiles

At the time of the missile crisis, the Soviet Union had many more troops and non-nuclear weapons in Europe than the United States and its NATO allies. The United States, however, had a greater nuclear capacity and depended on nuclear weapons to deter the Soviets from attacking U.S. allies. The United States had installed Jupiter missiles in Turkey to protect the southern European members of NATO. By 1962, these missiles were outmoded and vulnerable to Soviet attack. In response, the United States had developed the Polaris submarine, which carried nuclear missiles. Traveling deep underwater, the submarine was very difficult to destroy. President Kennedy made plans in 1961 to add a Polaris submarine to the U.S. Mediterranean fleet and had scheduled the removal of the old Jupiter missiles.



AP Photo/Kreusch. Used with permission.

Berlin, Germany October 1961: U.S. and Soviet tanks stare each other down across Checkpoint Charlie (a crossing point between the U.S. and Soviet sectors.) The United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and France each occupied sectors of Berlin after defeating Germany in World War II.

What did U.S. leaders think Soviet intentions were?

When U.S. leaders discovered that the Soviets were installing nuclear missiles in Cuba, they were stunned. No one was sure of Khrushchev or Castro's intentions. Would the nuclear missiles be used to threaten Cuba's

Latin American neighbors, or even intimidate the United States? Did the communist leaders believe that the United States would not oppose their plan? In October 1962, Americans did not know the answers to these questions.

Theodore Sorensen, an adviser to Kennedy, remembers that the president and his inner

circle simply did not know what Khrushchev's motives were.

“The only honest answer I have is, ‘I don’t know now, and I didn’t know then.’ None of us knew. We could only speculate about what Khrushchev was up to.”

—Theodore Sorensen

Khrushchev's motives aside, the White House was shocked that the Soviets had ignored U.S. warnings against putting missiles in Cuba. President Kennedy was especially indignant at the secrecy surrounding the Soviet operation. Kennedy administration officials recognized that members of Congress and the American media would press for a strong U.S. response.

Why was the Kennedy administration concerned about the missiles?

In the White House, there was little disagreement that nuclear missiles in Cuba would pose a grave threat to U.S. security. For the first time, American territory would be highly vulnerable to Soviet nuclear attack. From the U.S. perspective, the question was not whether

the missiles should be removed but how.

President Kennedy and his advisers were particularly concerned about the operational status of the missiles in Cuba. The original U-2 reconnaissance photos had shown that the missiles and their silos were not yet ready for use. Kennedy, however, was uncertain of the progress being made on the missile bases. As far as the president and his advisers were concerned, they were maneuvering in a minefield.

Initially, President Kennedy and his advisers decided to keep their knowledge of the missiles secret from the Soviets and the American public. On October 16, the president called together his closest and most trusted advisers to help him manage the crisis. This group was the Executive Committee of the National Security Council, or “ExComm.”

President Kennedy and ExComm met to consider the options for removing the Soviet missiles from Cuba. Over the next four days, the discussion produced three distinct choices for U.S. action, ranging from the purely diplomatic to a full-scale military assault. Each of the three strategies had supporters within ExComm and President Kennedy weighed each carefully.

Options in Brief

Option 1: Pursue Diplomacy

The United States should pursue purely diplomatic actions through the United Nations (UN) in order to pressure the Soviets to remove the missiles from Cuba. This would reduce the likelihood of military conflict. Any other steps could be too dangerous. We should also work with the Organization of American States (OAS) to bring pressure on Cuba from other Latin American states. As a means of resolving the crisis, the United States would be publicly willing to eliminate U.S. Jupiter missiles in Turkey in exchange for the withdrawal of Soviet missiles from Cuba.

Option 2: Blockade Cuba

The U.S. Navy should blockade Cuba. This action would prevent the arrival of Soviet ships carrying materials necessary to make the missiles operational. A naval blockade represents a combination of diplomatic and military responses, but minimizes the risks to U.S. military personnel as well as Cubans and Soviets. The United States will demonstrate its willingness to fight if necessary, but there would still be room for a peaceful solution if the Soviets and Cubans are cooperative.

Option 3: Airstrike and Invade

The U.S. military should launch an air strike followed by an invasion to destroy the missile sites. Although such an action would risk American lives and is likely to kill Soviet and Cuban military personnel and Cuban civilians, it is worth the cost to preserve our safety and our credibility as an opponent of the Soviet Union. Failure to respond to the missile build-up will lead to a loss of confidence in the United States, particularly in Latin America, and provide encouragement to pro-communist forces there. The free peoples of the world are depending on us. We cannot appear to be weak or indecisive.

Option 1: Pursue Diplomacy

The placement of missiles in Cuba is an affront that we cannot bear. However, we must not let our anger get the better of us and provoke a series of events that could cost the lives of millions. Even a limited military response against Cuba could kill Soviet military personnel in Cuba. We must face the possibility that this could provoke a Soviet response against Berlin or against NATO bases in Turkey. What would come next? No one knows. It could escalate to a deadly exchange of missiles.

The world teeters on the brink of catastrophe. The United States should pursue purely diplomatic actions through the United Nations (UN) in order to pressure the Soviets to remove the missiles from Cuba. This would reduce the likelihood of military conflict. We should send personal emissaries to both Castro and Khrushchev. This would allow us to begin to uncover their motives and objectives. We must be clear that it is the Soviets that have caused this crisis. They promised that they would not put nuclear weapons into Cuba, even as they were doing just that. Because of their rash actions in Cuba and their threats against Berlin, we are in danger of upsetting the delicate nuclear balance. The United States cannot be hasty. We are not a nation that is rash, impulsive, or indifferent to the safety of the human race. We must recognize that negotiation involves give and take.

As a means of resolving this crisis, we must be willing to eliminate our Jupiter missiles in Turkey on the Soviet border in exchange for the withdrawal of Soviet missiles in Cuba. The United States will never accept the blackmail and intimidation of the Soviet Union. Yet given the tremendous consequences, it is only sane that we first attempt to negotiate a solution to this serious problem. History will not be kind to a nation that is blamed for firing the first shot that unleashes a nuclear exchange and brings unfathomable destruction to the earth. The United States must not be the nation that starts a nuclear war. Rather, this is a battle that we can win in the court of public opinion.

Beliefs and Assumptions Underlying Option 1

1. Military action by the United States could lead to a nuclear exchange with the Soviet Union and grave damage to the United States.

2. Diplomacy and communication hold the most promise for resolving an

international issue of this magnitude.

3. The United States must be willing to trade missile bases in Turkey—publicly—in exchange for the removal of the missiles in Cuba.

Supporting Arguments for Option 1

1. Any other course of action would risk the lives of Americans and others.

2. Diplomatic efforts would help build world opinion on the side of the United States in the United Nations and the Organization of American States.

3. Diplomacy gives the United States time to assess the situation, gather information, and build coalitions with other nations. It prevents hasty or rash action that could prove dangerous.

From the Historical Record

Statement to ExComm by Secretary of State Dean Rusk

“We [should] stimulate the OAS [Organization of American States] procedure immediately for prompt action to make it quite clear the entire hemisphere considers that the Rio Pact has been violated.... The OAS could constitute itself as an organ of consultation promptly, although maybe it may take two or three days to get instructions from governments and things of that sort. The OAS could, I suppose, at any moment, take action to insist to the Cubans that an OAS inspection team be permitted to come and look directly at these sites, [and] provide assurances to the hemisphere.”

Statement to President Kennedy by U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Adlai Stevenson

“Let’s not go into an air strike until we have explored the possibilities of a peaceful solution.”

Statement to ExComm by Secretary of State Dean Rusk

“I think also that we ought to consider getting some word to Castro, perhaps through the Canadian ambassador in Havana or through his representative at the UN. I think perhaps the Canadian ambassador would be the best, the better channel to get to Castro, get him apart privately and tell him that this is no longer support for Cuba, that Cuba is being victimized here, and that the Soviets are preparing Cuba for destruction, or betrayal. You saw the [*New York Times*] story yesterday morning that high Soviet officials were saying: ‘We’ll trade Cuba for Berlin.’ This ought to be brought to Castro’s attention. It ought to be said to Castro that this kind of a base is intolerable and not acceptable.”

Memorandum to President Kennedy by U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Adlai Stevenson

“To start or to risk starting a nuclear war is bound to be divisive at best and the judgments of history seldom coincide with the tempers of the moment...you should have made it clear that the existence of nuclear missile bases anywhere is negotiable before we start anything.”

Statement to ExComm by Secretary of State Dean Rusk

“I think we’ll be facing a situation that could well lead to general war. Now with that we have an obligation to do what has to be done, but to do it in a way that gives everybody a chance to pull away before it gets too hard.”

Memorandum by former U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union Charles Bohlen

“The existence of Soviet MRBM [medium range ballistic missiles] bases in Cuba cannot be tolerated. The objective therefore is their elimination by whatever means may be necessary. There are two means in essence: by diplomatic action or by military action. No one can guarantee that this can be achieved by diplomatic action, but it seems to me essential that this channel should be tested out before military action is employed. If our decision is firm (and it must be) I can see no danger in communication with Khrushchev privately, worded in such a way that he realized that we mean business. This I consider as an essential first step.”

Option 2: Blockade Cuba

The United States cannot put up with the presence of offensive nuclear weapons just ninety miles from its shores. The Soviet Union has misled us privately and publicly about its intentions in Cuba. Its motivations for this deployment are unclear. We must be prepared for any eventuality, including that the weapons would be used against us or used to pressure us to withdraw from Berlin. The United States must steer a careful course. If we tolerate the presence of these missiles in Cuba our credibility and courage will be questioned around the world. We will use force if necessary, but a blockade could allow us to pursue a solution with the Soviets that does not back them into a corner.

The U.S. Navy should blockade Cuba. Our military experts cannot tell us for sure how many or if any missiles in Cuba are operational. We must factor in this uncertainty. They also say that they cannot guarantee the destruction of all of the missiles if we launch an air strike. If a surprise air strike cannot eliminate the risk of a missile launch from Cuba against the United States, then it is too dangerous to undertake such an action. A naval blockade would prevent the arrival of Soviet ships carrying more missiles or materials necessary to make the missiles operational. It allows for a peaceful solution.

A naval blockade represents a combination of diplomatic and military responses, but without the danger that would be caused by an immediate U.S. attack. On the other hand, an unannounced U.S. attack against Cuba holds the disadvantage of losing the moral high ground for the United States. We tried Japanese officials as war criminals for their sneak attack on Pearl Harbor. A sneak attack on Cuba would discredit us in the eyes of the world today and for generations to come.

The United States still maintains a significant edge in nuclear weapons over the Soviet Union even with these weapons so close to our shores. Our overwhelming nuclear superiority will deter any Soviet action against the United States.

Beliefs and Assumptions Underlying Option 2

1. The consequences and risks of a military attack on the missiles in Cuba are impossible to predict. A surprise military attack erodes U.S. moral standing around the world.

2. Using diplomacy could take months or years, allowing more missiles to be brought to and assembled in Cuba.

3. Accepting Soviet missiles on Cuban territory erodes U.S. standing around the world as a defense against the Soviet Union.

4. The Soviet missiles in Cuba do not actually change the strategic balance. The United States still has an overwhelming edge in nuclear weapons over the Soviet Union.

Supporting Arguments for Option 2

1. A blockade is a prudent and flexible step that would allow the United States to move to military action (if necessary) without being accused of having conducted a “Pearl Harbor”-style attack.

2. Diplomatic action alone, without a blockade, would allow the Soviet Union to

continue to assemble missiles in Cuba.

3. A blockade of Cuba would prevent the Soviet Union from delivering more missiles and weapons to Cuba. It is a prudent first step demonstrating U.S. resolve against Soviet expansionism.

From the Historical Record

Statement to Joint Chiefs of Staff by President John F. Kennedy

“If we attack Cuban missiles, or Cuba, in any way, it gives them [the Soviet Union] a clear line to go ahead and take Berlin, as they were able to in Hungary [in 1956] under the Anglo war [Suez Crisis] in Egypt. We would be regarded as trigger-happy Americans who lost Berlin. We would affect the West Germans’ attitude towards us. And [people would believe] that we let Berlin go because we didn’t have the guts to endure a situation in Cuba.”

Statement to Joint Chiefs of Staff by President John F. Kennedy

“So there isn’t any doubt that, whatever [military] action we take against Cuba, no matter how good our films are, or what this is going to cause in Latin America, a lot of people would regard this as a mad act by the United States, which is due to a loss of nerve.”

Statement to ExComm by Llewellyn Thompson, Former U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union

“My preference is this blockade plan...I think it’s very highly doubtful that the Russians would resist a blockade against military weapons, particularly offensive ones, if that’s the way we pitched it to the world.”

Statement to ExComm, by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara

“I don’t think there is a military problem here.... I’ve gone through this today, and I asked myself: ‘Well, what is it then, if it isn’t a military problem?’ Well, it is just exactly this problem: that if Cuba should possess a capacity to carry out offensive action against the U.S., the U.S. would act. Now it’s that problem. This is a domestic political problem. The announcement. [McNamara refers to a recent U.S. government announcement saying that it would not tolerate the presence of Soviet offensive weapons in Cuba.] We didn’t say we’d go in or not, and kill them. We said we’d act. Well, how will we act? Well, we want to act to prevent their use, and it’s really the act. Now

how do we prevent their use? Well, first place, we carry out open surveillance, so we know what they’re doing. [At] all times. Twenty-four hours a day from now and forever, in a sense, indefinitely. What else do we do? We prevent further offensive weapons coming in. In other words, we blockade offensive weapons. And then an ultimatum. I call it an ultimatum associated with these two actions, a statement to the world, particularly to Khrushchev, that we have located offensives. We’re maintaining a constant surveillance over them. If there is ever any indication that they’re to be launched against this country, we will respond not only against Cuba, but we will respond directly against the Soviet Union with a full nuclear strike. Now, this alternative doesn’t seem to be a very acceptable one. But wait until you work on the others.”

Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara

“If you go to nuclear war, and the other side retaliates, and only a few—maybe only one—bomb gets through to destroy an American city, you—the one who just initiated the nuclear war—will have to shoulder the responsibility for the worst catastrophe in the history of this country.”

Memorandum by Undersecretary of State George Ball

“I am persuaded that the disadvantages of an air strike are too great for us to undertake. I have, therefore, concluded that the blockade plan—while by no means wholly satisfactory—is the course we should follow.... It is my strongly held view that we cannot launch a surprise attack against Cuba without destroying our moral position and alienating our friends and allies. If we were to do so, we would wake up the following morning to find that we had brought down in ruins the structure of alliances and arrangements and that our whole post-war effort of trying to organize the combined strength of the Free World was in shards and tatters.”

Option 3: Airstrike and Invade

Khrushchev has gone too far this time. The communists are threatening our security and way of life all around the world. Now they have the audacity to place nuclear missiles just ninety miles from our shores. We have warned the Soviet Union not to put offensive weapons in Cuba. The Soviets have assured us they would not. Now they have. The United States must act decisively and with force to remove this threat and to preserve our credibility with our political allies and neutral countries.

U.S. Air Force bombers should immediately launch an air strike to destroy the missile sites to prevent them from becoming operational. Because there is no guarantee that all of the missile sites would be destroyed in such a strike, a full-scale invasion of Cuba will need to follow. We do not have time to spare. Negotiations would give the Soviets the ability to make or to propose compromises and would not halt the deployment. While such military actions would risk American lives and kill Soviet and Cuban military personnel and Cuban civilians, it is worth the cost to preserve our safety and our credibility as an opponent of the Soviet Union. Failure to respond definitively to the missile build-up will lead to a loss of confidence in the United States and provide encouragement to pro-communist forces, particularly in Latin America.

A full-scale invasion could accomplish not only the removal of the missiles but also the end of the Castro regime. The Soviet Union is testing the resolve of the United States by placing missiles in our strategic backyard. Failure to react here means we will face more challenges around the world from the Soviets. The free peoples of the world are depending on us. We cannot appear to be weak or indecisive. History has taught us what comes from appeasing tyrants—war, suffering, and more tyrannical aggression. A weak response encouraged Hitler. We must not encourage the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union has backed down when faced with strong action by the United States. They will do so again.

Beliefs and Assumptions Underlying Option 3

1. Soviet missiles in Cuba are an immediate threat to the security of the United States and must be dealt with by whatever means are necessary.

2. The United States military

can successfully neutralize the Soviet missiles in Cuba.

3. The Soviet Union will not respond militarily elsewhere in the world to U.S. military action against Cuba.

Supporting Arguments for Option 3

1. A military strike against Cuba signals that the United States is not prepared to bargain bases in Cuba for positions in Berlin and elsewhere.

2. Eliminating the missiles with force protects the U.S. position in the Western

Hemisphere by demonstrating our will to fight to protect national interests.

3. Military action against the missiles and Cuba would eliminate a military threat to the United States.

From the Historical Record

Memorandum by Secretary of the Treasury Douglas Dillon

“It is my view that the Soviet Union has now deliberately initiated a public test of our intentions that can determine the future course of world events for many years to come. If we allow the offensive capabilities presently in Cuba to remain there, I am convinced that sooner or later and probably sooner we will lose all Latin America to Communism because all credibility of our willingness to effectively resist Soviet military power will have been removed in the eyes of the Latins. We can also expect similar reactions elsewhere, for instance in Iran, Thailand, and Pakistan. I, therefore, believe that the survival of our nation demands the prompt elimination of the offensive weapons now.”

Statement to President Kennedy by General Maxwell Taylor, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff

“I think we all would be unanimous in saying that really our strength in Berlin, our strength any place in the world, is the credibility of our response under certain conditions. And if we don’t respond here in Cuba, we think the credibility is sacrificed.”

Statement to President Kennedy by General Curtis Lemay, Air Force Chief of Staff

“I’d emphasize, a little strongly perhaps, that we don’t have any choice except direct military action. If we do this blockade that’s proposed, the first thing that’s going to happen is your missiles are going to disappear into the

woods, particularly your mobile ones. Now, we can’t find them, regardless of what we do, and then we’re going to take some damage if we try to do anything later on.... Now, as for the Berlin situation, I don’t share your view that if we knock off Cuba, they’re going to knock off Berlin. We’ve got the Berlin problem staring us in the face anyway. If we don’t do anything to Cuba, then they’re going to push on Berlin and push real hard because they’ve got us on the run.... So I see no other solution. This blockade and political action, I see leading into war. I don’t see any other solution. It will lead right into war. This is almost as bad as the appeasement at Munich.”

Statement to President Kennedy by General Earle Wheeler, Army Chief of Staff

“The lowest-risk course of action it would take in protecting the people of the United States against a possible strike on us is to go ahead with a surprise air strike, the blockade, and an invasion, because these series of actions progressively will give us increasing assurance that we really have gone after the offensive capability of the Cuban/Soviet corner. Now, admittedly, we can never be absolutely sure until and unless we actually occupy the island.”

Epilogue: On the Brink

On October 20, President Kennedy decided on a blockade of Cuba by the U.S. Navy to prevent further shipments of military supplies to the island. The president decided to use the word “quarantine” instead of the word “blockade” because international law considered a blockade to be an act of war. This option allowed the president to steer a middle course among ExComm’s varied options.

On the evening of October 22, Kennedy announced in a televised speech to the American public that the Soviets were installing nuclear missiles in Cuba. He then informed the nation of his decision to enforce a quarantine of Cuba until the missiles were removed. At the time, the president expected that the quarantine would be only the first step in a long war of nerves with the Soviets. In his speech, Kennedy warned that “many months of sacrifice

and self-discipline lie ahead, months in which both our patience and our will will be tested.”

How did the American public react to President Kennedy’s speech?

Kennedy’s speech was designed to galvanize the American public into supporting the quarantine decision of their president. Nonetheless, some critics felt that Kennedy had been too rash and that he should have given diplomacy more of a chance. Others feared that Kennedy would behave with the “same timidity and indecision which doomed the Bay of Pigs.” Many Americans simply held their breath and hoped that the world would not be consumed in a nuclear holocaust.

“Can you imagine not seeing another Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter, birthday, dance, or even Halloween?... We’re just too young to die.”

—A Massachusetts schoolgirl

What was the Soviet Union’s reaction to Kennedy’s speech?

Kennedy’s October 22 address caught the Soviet government off guard. For several hours, there was no response. Soviet diplomats in the United States were especially baffled. Like most Americans, they first learned of the Soviet missile build-up in Cuba through Kennedy’s speech. In Moscow, Khrushchev’s first reaction was anger. On October 23, he blasted the U.S. quarantine of Cuba as a violation of international law. Khrushchev maintained that the missiles in Cuba, regardless of their type, were meant “exclusively for defensive purposes, in order to secure the Cuban republic from an aggressor’s attack.” He also warned the United States that military aggression toward Cuba might lead to nuclear war.



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What diplomatic steps did the United States take?

The U.S. government moved quickly to gain international backing for the quarantine. The U.S. ambassador to the UN, Adlai Stevenson, denounced the introduction of missiles in Cuba in a speech to the UN Security Council. He charged that Castro “aided and abetted an invasion of the hemisphere,” making himself “an accomplice in the communist enterprise of world domination.” Stevenson called for a UN vote to condemn the installation of Soviet missiles in Cuba, but the Soviet ambassador to the UN vetoed Stevenson’s proposal.

The Organization of American States (OAS), on the other hand, did vote twenty to zero in support of the U.S. quarantine, condemned the Soviet Union as an aggressor, and branded Cuba as a threat to security in the hemisphere. The secret manner in which the missiles were placed in Cuba infuriated Latin American governments. Many Latin American leaders also feared Cuban support of communist guerrilla movements in their own countries.

What military steps did the United States take?

As the crisis intensified, many Americans feared that war, possibly nuclear war, was probable. The U.S. naval quarantine went into effect October 24. Initially, Khrushchev ordered Soviet ships to race toward the quar-

antine line. The Soviets threatened to sink any U.S. vessel that tried to prevent their passage to Cuba. That same day, the government put U.S. nuclear forces on DEFCON 2 alert for the first and only time in history: bombers remained airborne, and missile silo covers were opened in preparation for launching. On October 25, at least a dozen Soviet ships en route to Cuba turned back, but preparations at the missile sites on the island accelerated. Soviets and Cubans started working around the clock to make the missiles operational.

War seemed even more likely when Soviet forces shot down a U.S. reconnaissance flight over Cuba on October 27, killing the pilot, Major Rudolf Anderson. The day before Castro had ordered Cuban air defense forces to fire on any U.S. aircraft that flew within range. Meanwhile, ExComm received reports that the missiles in Cuba were about to become operational.

The tension was reaching a breaking point. If the Soviets refused to back down, the United States would be faced with the options to allow the missiles to remain in Cuba, launch an air strike, or to invade the island. To make matters more difficult, there was no assurance that the Soviets exercised complete control over the missile sites, as Khrushchev claimed. No one in Washington knew for sure if nuclear warheads had reached Cuba, but U.S. leaders had no choice but to assume that they were on the island. With these pressures bearing down

DEFCON

DEFCON, or Defense Condition, refers to the U.S. state of readiness for nuclear war. The DEFCON scale runs from five, for peace-time conditions, to zero, for a nuclear attack. On October 24, 1962, the Strategic Air Command was placed on DEFCON 2 for the first and only time in history. Below is a summary of DEFCON 2 measures.

1. Battle staffs were placed on twenty-four hour alert.
2. All military personnel were forbidden to go on leave.
3. One hundred and eighty-three bombers were dispatched to thirty-three airfields.
4. One-eighth of all U.S. B-52 bombers were constantly airborne.
5. Additional bombers were placed on alert on runways throughout the United States.
6. Ninety U.S. nuclear missiles were placed at a heightened state of readiness.

“A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall”

The feelings that many Americans had during the missile crisis may be hard to imagine today. Although reactions varied, the effects of the crisis influenced the lives of many and found expression in popular culture. One reaction can be found in the words of the well-known singer Bob Dylan. Dylan wrote the song “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall” during the missile crisis.

“Hard Rain is a desperate kind of song. Every line in it is actually the start of a whole song. But when I wrote it, I thought I wouldn’t have enough time alive to write all those songs so I put all I could into this one.”

—Bob Dylan

Below is the third stanza from Dylan’s “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall.”

And what did you hear, my blue-eyed son?
 And what did you hear, my darling young one?
 I heard the sound of a thunder, it roared out a warnin’,
 Heard the roar of a wave that could drown the whole world,
 Heard one hundred drummers whose hands were a-blazin’,
 Heard ten thousand whisperin’ and nobody listenin’,
 Heard one person starve, I heard many people laughin’,
 Heard the song of a poet who died in the gutter,
 Heard the sound of a clown who cried in the alley,
 And it’s a hard, and it’s a hard, it’s a hard, it’s a hard,
 And it’s a hard rain’s a-gonna fall.

The complete lyrics can be found at:
www.bobdylan.com/songs/hardrain.html.

out of Cuba in return for a U.S. pledge not to invade the island.

On October 27, a second letter arrived signed by Khrushchev. This letter took a much more hardline position, insisting that the United States remove its nuclear missiles from Turkey in return for a withdrawal of Soviet missiles from Cuba. Kennedy found the demands contained in the second letter unacceptable for two reasons. First, Turkey was not willing to have the Jupiter missiles removed. Turkey and other U.S. allies on the Mediterranean counted on U.S. medium-range nuclear missiles to deter an attack by the Soviet Union. Second, with the world watching, Kennedy did not want to appear weak in the confrontation of superpowers, nor did he want his NATO allies to doubt the U.S. commitment to defend Europe.

on ExComm, the committee reconsidered the possibility of removing U.S. Jupiter missiles from Turkey in exchange for the withdrawal of Soviet missiles from Cuba. But even supporters of such a plan recognized that it should not be seen as a public trade.

What role did two letters Khrushchev wrote to Kennedy have in the crisis?

Two letters Khrushchev wrote to Kennedy marked a new stage in the crisis. The first letter, received October 26, was an emotional appeal apparently composed by Khrushchev himself, calling on Kennedy to avoid the catastrophe of nuclear war. Khrushchev indicated that the Soviet Union would take its missiles

How did Kennedy

respond to Khrushchev?

After hours of analyzing and discussing the two letters, Kennedy and his advisers decided to respond only to the first letter and to ignore the second one. On the evening of October 27, the president offered to “give assurances against the invasion of Cuba” and to “remove promptly” the quarantine measures that were in effect. In return, Kennedy expected the Soviets to remove the missiles from Cuba under international observation and supervision. Kennedy also demanded safeguards to ensure that the Soviets would not place such weapons in Cuba again.

That same evening, President Kennedy

sent his brother, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, to meet with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin. During the course of his meeting, Robert Kennedy warned Ambassador Dobrynin that events were spiraling out of control. Unless the Soviets agreed to remove the missiles, Kennedy stated, the president would order U.S. forces to destroy them.

“We had to have a commitment by tomorrow that those bases would be removed. I was not giving them an ultimatum but a statement of fact. He should understand that if they did not remove those bases, we would remove them. President Kennedy had great respect for the Ambassador’s country and the courage of its people. Perhaps his country might find it necessary to take retaliatory action; but before that was over, there would not only be dead Americans but dead Russians as well.... Time was running out. We had only a few more hours—we needed an answer immediately from the Soviet Union. I said we must have it the next day.”

—Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy

Robert Kennedy also revealed to Dobrynin that the U.S. missiles in Turkey were outmoded and that the United States had already made plans before the crisis to remove them. However, he advised Dobrynin that if the Soviets tried to present the withdrawal as a missile trade, the United States would deny that any such agreement existed.

Why was President Kennedy so anxious about the Soviet response to his ultimatum?

Neither the president nor his advisers were confident that Khrushchev would accept the final American offer. U.S. preparations for an air strike against the missile sites and an invasion of Cuba intensified. Over 100,000 battle-ready troops massed in Florida to await the president’s orders.

No one was sure what Khrushchev’s

reaction would be to a U.S. invasion of Cuba. Would Khrushchev retaliate against U.S. forces in West Berlin, or Turkey? If Soviets were killed in Cuba, would the USSR strike at NATO troops in Europe? Worse yet, if some of the missiles in Cuba were ready for launch, would they be fired at invading U.S. troops or targets in the United States? Members of the ExComm pondered the dangers facing their country after their meeting at 9 p.m. on Saturday, October 27.

President Kennedy had just read Barbara Tuchman’s *The Guns of August*, which described how the leaders of Europe miscalculated their way into World War I in 1914. The president did not want this crisis to become the subject of a future book about how superpower miscalculations led to World War III.

“If anybody is around to write after this, they are going to understand that we made every effort to find peace and every effort to give our adversary room to move. I am not going to push the Russians an inch beyond what is necessary.”

—President John F. Kennedy

What did Castro say in his cable to Khrushchev?

On October 27, Khrushchev received President Kennedy’s letter and Ambassador Dobrynin’s report of his meeting with Robert Kennedy. In addition, he received a cable from Castro. The Cuban leader expressed his belief that the United States would invade his island in the coming days and called on Khrushchev to launch nuclear missiles at the United States in response to the expected attack.

Khrushchev was faced with a difficult decision. Should the Soviet leader refuse the U.S. offer, risk military confrontation, and a possible invasion of Cuba? Should he stick to his proposed swap of Turkish missiles for Cuban missiles and hope that the United States would give in? Or should he accept President Kennedy’s offer?

The next day, Premier Khrushchev chose

to defuse the confrontation. In order to get the message as quickly as possible to President Kennedy, Khrushchev ordered that a message be broadcast by radio. Radio Moscow announced that the Soviet Union was ordering the dismantling and removal of the missiles in exchange for U.S. guarantees of Cuban sovereignty. The Cuban missile crisis, which had brought the superpowers to the brink of war, possibly nuclear war, was over.

“The Soviet government, in addition to earlier instructions on the discontinuance of further work on construction sites, has given a new order to dismantle the weapons, which you describe as offensive, and to crate them and return them to the Soviet Union.”

—Official Communiqué of the Soviet Union

Castro’s Crisis

Castro was enraged by Khrushchev’s decision. News of the deal between the Soviets and the Americans reached him by radio. The Soviets did not consult him because Moscow believed that he would not endorse the U.S.-Soviet agreement.

Once the missile crisis had burst into public view, Castro pushed for a five-part agreement that would end the quarantine, and also would guarantee Cuba against U.S. attack, limit the activities of anti-Castro Cuban exiles living in Miami, return the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo to Cuba, and end the ongoing U.S. economic blockade of Cuba.

While Moscow, Washington, and the rest of the world breathed easier after October 28, Castro kept Cuba on a war footing. He had already ordered the mobilization of 270,000 Cuban soldiers on October 22 in anticipation of a U.S. invasion. Castro was convinced that the United States would not honor its pledge not to invade Cuba. He had believed all along that the Soviet missiles were needed to deter U.S. intervention and defend the Cuban revolution.

In the weeks following the resolution of the missile crisis, Soviet diplomats pressed Castro to accept the Kennedy-Khrushchev agreement. Castro, however, would not permit U.S. specialists to come to Cuba to verify the removal of the missiles, and he accused the Soviets of abandoning Cuba in the face of U.S. aggression. Verification had to take place in international waters. The Soviet-Cuban talks dragged on until November 19 before Castro reluctantly gave his assent to other aspects of the agreement. Adding to the pressure the Cuban leader felt, the United States continued its naval quarantine and daily reconnaissance flights during the negotiations.

In the end, Castro saw the arrangement that resolved the missile crisis as a threat to Cuba’s security. Khrushchev had not only agreed to withdraw the missiles, but also to remove a squadron of Soviet bombers from the island.

“We believe that besides having salvaged world peace and having prevented nuclear war, we should also have salvaged peace for Cuba, a peace that included a halt to the economic blockade, turning over the naval base at Guantanamo, and an end to all attacks on Cuba.”

—Cuban official Jorge Risquet

How did the end of the crisis affect relations between the United States and the Soviet Union?

Throughout the Cuban missile crisis, the fear of nuclear war hung over the heads of both U.S. and Soviet leaders. President Kennedy said he believed that there was a 30 to 50 percent chance that the missile crisis would lead to a nuclear war.

In order to avoid a nuclear exchange, Khrushchev turned his back on his Cuban ally and came to terms with his Cold War rival. By doing so, the Soviet leader risked both his ties with Cuba and his country’s reputation as a global superpower.

After the missile crisis, The United States

and the Soviet Union established a hotline to ease communication between leaders in times of crisis. The arrangement featured teletype machines installed in both the Kremlin and the White House. Leaders reportedly used the hotline dozens of times. The hotline reduced the risk of a misunderstanding resulting in deadly conflict.

The missile crisis also impressed on the minds of Kennedy and Khrushchev the dangers of making nuclear threats against each other. Having come so close to the unthinkable horror of a nuclear war, leaders on both sides recognized the need to embark on a new path to prevent nuclear confrontation in the future.

“I am convinced that if there had been no Caribbean crisis, the danger of nuclear war in the subsequent years

would have been incomparably greater. Nuclear weapons might have been used in Vietnam and in other cases.”

—Georgy Shakhnazarov, an aide to former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev

Kennedy focused on building on the opening in Soviet-U.S. relations that the Cuban missile crisis created. The ideological conflict would continue, but both Khrushchev and Kennedy worked to diminish the tensions between the two nations.

“If we cannot now end our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity. For, in the final analysis, our most basic common link is the fact that we all inhabit this planet. We all breathe the same air.



John F. Kennedy Library. Used with permission.

A U.S. destroyer inspects a Soviet ship transporting a missile from Cuba to the Soviet Union.

We all cherish our children's future. And we are all mortal.... Confident and unafraid, we labor on—not toward a strategy of annihilation, but toward a strategy of peace.

—President John F. Kennedy,
American University Speech, 1963

What We Know Now: “One Hell of a Gamble”

With the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union thirty years later, key participants in the 1962 crisis from the United States, the former Soviet Union, and Cuba met on several occasions to review the events. Because of these discussions and the declassification of secret U.S., Soviet, and Cuban documents, we now know much more about Khrushchev's motives for installing nuclear missiles in Cuba as well as Castro's motives for accepting them. In addition, a clearer picture has emerged about the military circumstances around the Cuban missile crisis.

Why did Khrushchev install missiles in Cuba?

Following the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Soviets shared Castro's conviction that the United States would use force to snuff out communism in Cuba. They believed that nuclear weapons would be a powerful deterrent to a U.S. invasion of the island. Many scholars believe that one of Khrushchev's primary motives for installing the weapons was to protect Cuba.

Khrushchev also hoped to address the imbalance of nuclear forces between the superpowers. In 1962, the United States could claim a decisive edge over the Soviet Union both in sheer number of nuclear warheads (which contain the explosive device) and in the number of missiles. The U.S. nuclear arsenal consisted of three components: long-range missiles based on land, long-range bombers loaded with nuclear weapons, and submarine-launched missiles. In addition to nuclear forces based in the United States, more than one hundred U.S. missiles in Turkey could reach the Soviet Union, as could shorter-range

missiles stationed in other NATO countries.

In contrast, though we did not know it at the time, the Soviets' ability to strike U.S. territory was limited. Khrushchev boasted in the late 1950s that the Soviets were on the verge of overtaking the United States in nuclear missile technology. Concern about a “missile gap” created anxiety in the United States. Many Americans feared the Soviets would take the lead in deploying long-range nuclear missiles, just as they had launched the first space satellite in 1957.

Under Presidents Dwight Eisenhower and John Kennedy, additional funding went toward strengthening the country's nuclear capability. Meanwhile, U.S. policymakers came to realize that many of Khrushchev's claims were exaggerated. By the time of the missile crisis, Soviet nuclear capability was still far behind U.S. capability. U.S. intelligence in 1962 estimated that the Soviets had 75 land-based missiles capable of reaching American soil, while the United States had 226 missiles that could reach the USSR. In fact, we know now that the Soviets actually possessed only twenty missiles on their territory in October 1962. Moreover, the Soviets had no submarine-launched missiles and were at a seven-to-one disadvantage in long-range bombers.

“It naturally tormented our leadership a great deal. Because we were actually subject to a possible attack of American missile forces, and aviation forces, and we had nothing with which to respond.”

—Sergei N. Khrushchev, son of Premier
Nikita Khrushchev

Khrushchev believed that placing the missiles in Cuba would address the nuclear imbalance. The missiles would be within striking distance of many major American cities, including Washington D.C., and could reach key military bases in much of the Southeast. In addition, they could be used as bargaining chips to negotiate a withdrawal of U.S. nuclear forces from Turkey and other NATO countries, or as leverage to pressure the United

States to abandon West Berlin. The next phase of Khrushchev's plans in Cuba called for the installation of intermediate-range missiles that could reach almost every corner of the United States.

Scholars of the crisis conclude that in addition to protecting Cuba from external attack, the placement of the missiles was intended to correct the nuclear imbalance. According to Douglas Dillon, Kennedy's treasury secretary, the presence of forty missiles in Cuba "radically altered the numbers of deliverable warheads, and in that sense radically increased Soviet capability."

Former Soviet officials and scholars have confirmed that Khrushchev felt Soviet missiles in Cuba would serve as a response to the deployment of U.S. missiles in Turkey.

“Khrushchev wanted very much to make them [Americans] feel the same, to give them the same medicine which we were swallowing, having foreign missiles at our doorstep.”

—Aleksandr Alekseyev, Soviet Ambassador to Cuba during the crisis

Aleksandr Alekseyev, Soviet Ambassador to Cuba during the crisis, suggests that Khrushchev simply had not considered the possibility that the United States would react as strongly as it did.

Why did Castro agree to have missiles in Cuba?

While understanding Soviet motives in the crisis is crucial, the Cuban viewpoint is equally important. Castro knew that accepting Soviet missiles risked provoking a U.S. invasion or an air strike. Yet, Castro unhesitatingly welcomed the missiles, not only because he thought they would deter a U.S. attack on Cuba, but also because he believed that they would strengthen the Soviet Union and other communist countries.

“We agreed on the installation of the missiles, noting, first of all, that this assured an improvement in the socialist camp's defense capabilities, and that if the socialist camp was prepared to run a risk on Cuba's behalf, then Cuba should also assume its share of the risks.”

—Cuban Official Jorge Risquet

In Castro's mind, accepting the missiles was proof that Cuba was willing to position itself on the front line of the Cold War. Castro may have even been flattered by Khrushchev's offer to make Cuba the first communist country, other than the Soviet Union, in which Soviet nuclear missiles would be deployed.

“Fidel fell to thinking, and then said, ‘If this will serve the socialist camp, and if it will hinder the actions of American imperialism on the continent, I believe that we will agree.’”

—Aleksandr Alekseyev, Soviet Ambassador to Cuba during the crisis

Castro may also have believed that accepting the missiles would strengthen Cuba's ties to Moscow, and would demonstrate to Moscow that Cuba was willing to take risks. According to scholars close to the crisis, Castro probably hoped that his actions would be reciprocated in some way at a later date.

How great was the danger of the use of nuclear weapons during the crisis?

Both Kennedy and Khrushchev were terribly anxious about the possibility of nuclear war. Newly discovered evidence suggests that their fears were justified. According to the head of operational planning for the Soviet General Staff in 1962, General Anatoly Gribkov, nuclear warheads had indeed reached Cuba in the weeks before the missile crisis erupted in the international arena. The Soviet warheads (as many as 162 of them) were designed to be delivered by short-range, tactical nuclear missiles. The most powerful tactical

missiles on the island were capable of striking targets up to one hundred miles away. Although the U.S. mainland was beyond the range of the missiles, they could have been used with devastating results against American troops invading Cuba. At a 1992 meeting in Havana, Gribkov said that the missiles could have been launched by the Soviet commander in Cuba without authorization from Moscow.

“It horrifies me to think what would have happened in the event of an invasion of Cuba!... It would have been an absolute disaster for the world.... No one should believe that a U.S. force could have been attacked by tactical nuclear warheads without

responding with nuclear warheads. And where would it have ended? In utter disaster.”

—Kennedy’s Secretary of Defense
Robert S. McNamara

Kennedy, who had been under considerable pressure from the military and members of Congress to invade Cuba, had feared an invasion could provoke a nuclear response. Gribkov’s revelation proved his worries were well-founded.

“If we go into Cuba we have to realize that we are taking a chance that these missiles, which are ready to fire, won’t be fired.... The fact is that that is one hell of a gamble.”

—President John F. Kennedy

Optional Reading: Forty Years of U.S.-Cuban Relations

The end of the Soviet Union and the Cold War in 1991 has changed the definition of U.S. security throughout most of the world. U.S. officials today are not worried about the spread of communism, but they are concerned about refugee crises, drug trafficking, environmental issues, terrorism, and the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

U.S. relations with Russia and other nations of the former Soviet Union have evolved, but the relationship between the United States and Castro's Cuba remains frozen in time. Since the Cuban missile crisis, U.S.-Cuban relations have been filled with confrontation and disagreement. The combination of Castro's continued defiance of the United States coupled with a politically active Cuban-American community have not allowed the remaining embers of the Cold War to go out.

Why did tense relations with Cuba continue after the missile crisis?

U.S. citizens greeted the resolution of the Cuban missile crisis with a sigh of relief. The United States had stood up to communism; war had been avoided. There was even the possibility of better relations with the Soviet Union. Looking toward the future, most Americans felt confident that their country remained unrivaled as the strongest nation in the world. There seemed to be few limits to U.S. power in the early 1960s. The United States was willing to do whatever was necessary to contain the influence of the Soviet Union and the spread of communism.

Without question, the Cuban missile crisis aggravated the hostility between the United States and Cuba. Heightening tensions further, Castro undertook a bold foreign policy which clashed with U.S. efforts to contain communism.

Castro held up Cuba's communist system as a model for other developing countries, claiming that Cuba was on the path to offering its citizens a decent standard of living and equal opportunity. He also won admiration

for continuing to defy the United States. To the consternation of the United States, Castro sought to take advantage of Cuba's growing stature by encouraging revolutions in other nations, especially in Latin America.

An angered U.S. government continued a strict economic embargo against Cuba and worked to isolate Castro's government in the international arena. For its part, Cuba loudly condemned what Castro viewed as U.S. imperialism.

Cuba's aggressive foreign policy even strained its relationship with the Soviet Union. From the perspective of the Soviets, Castro was a potentially dangerous upstart who needlessly provoked the anger of the United States. Moscow had been supporting communist parties for years in Latin America and favored a slower, more calculated approach to laying the groundwork for a communist revolution. The Soviets warned Castro to follow their lead and they cut back oil shipments to Cuba in 1968 to make their point.

The United States had its own reasons to be upset at Castro. Castro had turned one of his lieutenants, Ernesto Che Guevara, loose to foment revolution in Bolivia. Castro had also shipped arms to guerrillas seeking to overthrow democratic governments in Venezuela and Costa Rica. The United States believed that Castro's actions were designed to undermine the Alliance for Progress, a new U.S. program designed to bolster democracy and social reform in Latin America. Initiated by President Kennedy in 1961, the program called for the United States to provide \$20 billion over ten years to fund economic development in the region. Kennedy had also created the Peace Corps to allow thousands of young Americans to participate in projects designed to improve everyday life in Latin America and other parts of the world.

How did Cold War security concerns affect the U.S. response to Cuba?

President Kennedy also beefed up the

U.S. military response to the Cuban threat. To help governments in Latin America and other regions defeat communist rebels, the United States formed an elite counterinsurgency corps, known as the Green Berets. The United States helped modernize military units throughout the hemisphere to combat well-organized guerrilla units and also trained police forces to control urban riots and prevent sabotage.

The ongoing conflict between the United States and the Soviet-Cuban alliance made security and stability in the region a top priority for each U.S. president. To counter forces supported by the Castro government, the United States often found itself on the side of leaders who violated democratic principles.

How important was the Soviet Union to Cuba?

By the end of the 1960s, many of the early hopes of the Cuban revolution had waned. Other countries in Latin America did not follow Cuba’s example. The United States maintained an economic embargo against Cuba, and the revolution’s radical economic experiments led to confusion and shortages.

Castro understood that Cuba could not afford to lose Soviet aid. He signed trade agreements in 1972 that firmly linked the two countries economically. Cuba also loyally supported the Soviet position in the UN and other international forums. By the middle of the 1970s, Cuba had received billions of dollars in aid from Moscow. Soviet oil shipments shielded Cuba from the energy price hikes that began in 1973. Castro’s economy grew at an impressive pace. At the same time, Cuba and the Soviet Union worked together to

promote communism in what was then known as the third world.

How did the election of Ronald Reagan affect U.S. relations with Castro?

The election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 marked a new direction for the United States in the world. President Reagan placed anti-communism at the heart of his foreign policy. He labeled the Soviet Union the “evil empire” and saw Cuba as the source of revolutionary aggression in Central America and the Caribbean. Reagan’s pledge to stop communist expansion led to several clashes with the Castro government over its policies in Grenada, Nicaragua, and El Salvador.

At the close of the 1980s, the contest between the United States and Cuba clearly favored Washington. Cuban allies in Grenada had been swept away, and the guerrilla movement in El Salvador had failed to advance. Elections had replaced the government of Nicaragua with one more friendly to the United States. Meanwhile, the Cuban-American community of more than one million people, centered in South Florida, was becoming more



A billboard in Cuba illustrates the warm relations between Fidel Castro (right) and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. The message hails the Cuban-Soviet alliance as “a true example of fraternal relations.”

Historical Association of Southern Florida. Used with permission.

aggressive in its efforts to force Castro out of power.

On balance, the Reagan administration's anticommunist offensive in the region had reasserted U.S. strength, leaving Castro in a lonely position. Yet critics argued that Reagan exaggerated the communist threat in the Caribbean and Central America and that U.S. policies contributed to the cycle of violence and poverty in the region.

How did the collapse of the Soviet Union affect Cuba?

The collapse of the Soviet Union was a heavy blow to Cuba. During the 1980s, more than two-thirds of Cuba's trade was with the Soviet Union. The Cubans relied on the Soviets for oil and grain, while exporting to the USSR mostly sugar, nickel, and citrus fruits. Soviet trade subsidies supplied Cuba with at least \$3 billion in annual assistance, amounting to approximately one-quarter of Moscow's total foreign aid spending. The fall of communist leaders in Eastern Europe also stung

Castro. These regimes were important economic and military allies for Cuba. As Cuba's trade links with the former Soviet bloc unraveled, Cuban imports fell by more than 75 percent. Oil imports dropped by more than half, leaving much of Cuba's agricultural economy without fuel.

Castro enacted a strategy for holding onto power. He clamped down on political opposition and tightened his grip on the national economy. He announced a state of economic emergency. The government rationed food and imported one million bicycles from China to provide an alternative to the fuel-starved public transportation system. Castro pledged to fight in defense of the Cuban revolution and warned his people to prepare for a U.S. assault on the island.

The desperate economic situation forced Castro to find new trading partners. He opened beaches and nightclubs to foreign tourists. In 1995, he lowered barriers to foreign investment, giving foreigners the right to fully own businesses in Cuba. Cuban citizens themselves

Castro and Human Rights

After coming to power, Fidel Castro imprisoned thousands of Cubans who had opposed him in a bitter political struggle. Like many of those imprisoned in the early 1960s, Jorge Valls was jailed before Castro's revolution for actively opposing the rule of Fulgencio Batista. Castro's regime then imprisoned Valls in 1964 after he continued the struggle for democratic rights in his country. Below is an excerpt from Valls's account of the more than twenty years he spent in Castro's prisons:

"We lined up again for water. This was always extremely scarce and was administered by the chief of the galley. It was generally four cups apiece, and that was what we had to drink, bathe, and perhaps wash some underwear. We tried hard to use as little clothing as we could, a pair of shorts or a pair of cut-off trousers....We tried not to get too near each other, but it was inevitable. We would go for lunch and dinner in the collective dining room, one galley at a time....It was better not to look at your plate because it might come with small grubs, worms or cockroaches. We were too hungry to be squeamish. If someone found a cockroach or other unusual object floating in his dinner, he would say, 'This is protein,' and either eat it or throw it away.

"We, the prisoners, were not defeated in spirit, and in many ways we represented a threat to the regime. We were the most politically conscious sector of the population. There were so many of us that every family in Cuba had some kind of connection to someone in prison. We included dissident revolutionary leaders from every faction. Our numbers grew by the thousands, and soon the population of political prisoners, more than any battalion or political party, was the intellectual and political equivalent of the country's capital. That made us very dangerous."

found ways to make the best of a bad economic situation. Castro's government also legalized some kinds of self-employment, decriminalized dollar possession, and allowed private markets to exist. Most state farms began to organize into cooperatives. Castro now argues that his reforms have been designed not to transform but rather to save socialism.

What policies has the United States enacted towards Cuba since the end of the Cold War?

In the last decade, the United States has reinforced its economic embargo against Cuba. The Cuban Democracy Act of 1992 tightened the economic embargo against Castro's government by penalizing foreign subsidiaries of American firms that trade with Cuba. The Helms-Burton Act of 1996 put further pressure on the Castro government by punishing any nation that traded with or invested in Cuba.

The U.S. State Department has not fully implemented the Helms-Burton Act because of the adverse effect it would have on U.S. relationships with other countries. Even so, the United States has paid a diplomatic and economic price for its hard line toward Cuba. In 1994, more than one hundred countries in the UN voted to condemn the U.S. embargo against Cuba. The embargo has prevented U.S.



Jeff McNally in the Chicago Tribune. Reprinted with permission by TMS.

companies from taking advantage of trade and investment opportunities in Cuba—opportunities that have been seized by Canadian, Mexican, and European firms.

The U.S. economic embargo has had a detrimental effect on life in Cuba, although Cubans receive and depend on over one billion dollars per year from friends and family in the United States. Today, there is growing bi-partisan support for ending the embargo against Cuba and opening Cuba's market for U.S. goods. Nonetheless, Castro angrily continues to reject U.S. calls for democratic reforms in Cuba.

The difficult economic situation has forced Castro to appeal to Cuban nationalism (and anger toward the United States) rather than communist or socialist ideals to rally support for his government.

While the Cold War with the Soviet Union is over, it still casts a shadow over U.S.-Cuban relations. Castro seems determined to hold onto power; the United States remains determined to see him go. How long the standoff between the two nations will endure is unclear, although as long as Castro remains in power change seems unlikely. Nonetheless, while passions remain high in Havana and in the United States, the stakes are unlikely to be what they were during the Cuban missile crisis, when the fate of the world hung in the balance.

Supplementary Documents

Letter from Chairman Khrushchev to Prime Minister Castro, October 22, 1962

Dear Comrade Castro:

The Soviet Government has just received from the President of the U.S. the following document [referring to President Kennedy's televised speech to the nation on October 22, 1962, about the presence of Soviet missiles in Cuba]. We send you a copy.

We consider this declaration of the government of the United States and Kennedy's speech of October 22 to be an exceptional intervention in the affairs of the Republic of Cuba, a violation of the norms of international law and of the fundamental rules that govern relations between states and a blatant act of provocation against the Soviet Union. The Republic of Cuba has the same rights as any other sovereign state to defend its country and to choose its allies according to its wishes. We reject the Northamerican [sic] government's shameless demands to control the shipment of weapons to Cuba and its aspirations to determine the type of weapons that the Republic of Cuba may possess. The U.S. government knows perfectly well that no sovereign state would allow interference in its relations with other states and that it would not present accounts on measures taken to strengthen the defense of its country.

Responding to Kennedy's speech, the Soviet Government has issued a statement in which it expresses the most determined protest against the piratical actions of the Northamerican government and qualifies these actions as perfidious and aggressive against sovereign states, stating its decision to fight actively against such actions.

We have instructed our representative on the Security Council to present urgently the question of violation, by the U.S., of the norms of international law and the Charter of the United Nations Organization and to emit a determined protest against the aggressive and

perfidious actions of Northamerican imperialism.

Because of the situation that has arisen we have instructed the Soviet military representatives stationed in Cuba on the need to take the necessary measures and to be at full readiness.

We are sure that the actions undertaken by the Northamerican imperialists in trying to take away the legitimate right of the Republic of Cuba to strengthen its defensive capacity and to defend the motherland will provoke the angry protest of all peace-loving peoples and will provoke the mobilization of great masses to defend the just cause of Revolutionary Cuba.

We send you, comrade Castro, and all your comrades in arms, our warm greetings and express our firm certainty that the aggressive plans of Northamerican imperialism will suffer defeat.

N. Khrushchev

U.S. Proclamation on Interdiction of Offensive Weapons, October 23, 1962

WHEREAS the peace of the world and the security of the United States and of all American States are endangered by reason of the establishment by the Sino-Soviet powers of an offensive military capability in Cuba, including bases for ballistic missiles with a potential range covering most of North and South America;

WHEREAS by a Joint Resolution passed by the Congress of the United States and approved on October 3, 1962, it was declared that the United States is determined to prevent by whatever means may be necessary, including the use of arms, the Marxist-Leninist regime in Cuba from extending, by force or the threat of force, its aggressive or subversive activities to any part of this hemisphere, and to prevent in Cuba the creation or use of an externally supported military capability

endangering the security of the United States;
and

WHEREAS the Organ of Consultation of the American Republics meeting in Washington on October 23, 1962, recommended that the Member States, in accordance with Articles six and eight of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, take all measures, individually and collectively, including the use of armed force, which they may deem necessary to ensure that the Government of Cuba cannot continue to receive from the Sino-Soviet powers military material and related supplies which may threaten the peace and security of the Continent:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, JOHN F. KENNEDY, President of the United States of America, acting under and by virtue of the authority conferred upon me by the Constitution and statutes of the United States in accordance with the aforementioned resolutions of the United States Congress and of the Organ of Consultation of the American Republics, and to defend the security of the United States, do hereby proclaim that the forces under my command are ordered, beginning at 2:00 P.M. Greenwich time October 24, 1962, to interdict, subject to the instructions herein contained, the delivery of offensive weapons and associated material to Cuba.

For the purposes of this Proclamation the following are declared to be prohibited material:

Surface-to-surface missiles; bomber aircraft; bombs, air-to-surface rockets and guided missiles; warheads for any of the above weapons; mechanical or electronic equipment to support or operate the above items; and any other classes of material hereafter designated by the Secretary of Defense for the purpose of effectuating this Proclamation.

To enforce this order, the Secretary of Defense shall take appropriate measures to prevent the delivery of prohibited material to Cuba, employing the land, sea, and air forces of the United States in operation with any forces that may be made available by other American States.

The Secretary of Defense may make such regulations and issue such directives as he deems necessary to ensure the effectiveness of this order, including the designation, within a reasonable distance of Cuba, of prohibited or restricted zones and or prescribed routes.

Any vessel or craft which may be proceeding toward Cuba may be intercepted and may be directed to identify itself, its cargo, equipment and stores and its ports of call, to stop, to lie to, to submit to visit and search, or to proceed as directed. Any vessel or craft which fails or refuses to respond to or comply with directions shall be subject to being taken into custody. Any vessel or craft which it is believed is en route to Cuba and may be carrying prohibited material or may itself constitute such material shall, wherever possible, be directed to proceed to another destination of its own choice and shall be taken into custody if it fails or refuses to obey such directions. All vessels or craft taken into custody shall be sent into a port of the United States for appropriate disposition.

In carrying out this order, force shall not be used except in case of failure or refusal to comply with directions, or with regulations or directives of the Secretary of Defense issued hereunder, after reasonable efforts have been made to communicate them to the vessel or craft, or in case of self-defense. In any case, force shall be used only to the extent necessary.

Letter from Prime Minister Castro to Chairman Khrushchev, October 26, 1962

Dear Comrade Khrushchev:

Given the analysis of the situation and the reports which have reached us, [I] consider an attack to be almost imminent—within the next 24 to 72 hours. There are two possible variants: the first and most probable one is an air attack against certain objectives with the limited aim of destroying them; the second, and though less probable, still possible, is a full invasion. This would require a large force and is the most repugnant form of aggression,

which might restrain them.

You can be sure that we will resist with determination, whatever the case. The Cuban people's morale is extremely high and the people will confront aggression heroically.

I would like to briefly express my own personal opinion.

If the second variant takes place and the imperialists invade Cuba with the aim of occupying it, the dangers of their aggressive policy are so great that after such an invasion the Soviet Union must never allow circumstances in which the imperialists could carry out a nuclear first strike against it.

I tell you this because I believe that the imperialists' aggressiveness makes them extremely dangerous, and that if they manage to carry out an invasion of Cuba—a brutal act in violation of universal and moral law—then that would be the moment to eliminate this danger forever, in an act of the most legitimate self-defense. However harsh and terrible the solution, there would be no other.

This opinion is shaped by observing the development of their aggressive policy. The imperialists, without regard for world opinion and against laws and principles, have blockaded the seas, violated our air-space, and are preparing to invade, while at the same time blocking any possibility of negotiation, even though they understand the gravity of the problem.

You have been, and are, a tireless defender of peace, and I understand that these moments, when the results of your superhuman efforts are so seriously threatened, must be bitter for you. We will maintain our hopes for saving the peace until the last moment, and we are ready to contribute to this in any way we can. But, at the same time, we are serene and ready to confront a situation which we see as very real and imminent.

I convey to you the infinite gratitude and recognition of the Cuban people to the Soviet people, who have been so generous and fraternal, along with our profound gratitude and admiration to you personally. We wish

you success with the enormous task and great responsibilities which are in your hands.

Fraternally,
Fidel Castro

Letter from Chairman Khrushchev to President Kennedy, October 26, 1962

Dear Mr. President:

I have received your letter of October 25. From your letter I got the feeling that you have some understanding of the situation which has developed, and (some) sense of responsibility. I value this.

Now we have already publicly exchanged our evaluations of the events around Cuba and each of us has set forth his explanation and his understanding of these events. Consequently, I would judge that, apparently, a continuation of an exchange of opinions at such a distance, even in the form of secret letters, will hardly add anything to that which one side has already said to the other.

I think you will understand me correctly if you are really concerned about the welfare of the world. Everyone needs peace: both capitalists, if they have not lost their reason, and, still more, communists, people who know how to value not only their own lives but, more than anything, the lives of the peoples. We, communists, are against all wars between states in general and have been defending the cause of peace since we came into the world. We have always regarded war as a calamity, and not as a game nor as a means of the attainment of definite goals, nor, all the more, as a goal in itself. Our goals are clear, and the means to attain them is labor. War is our enemy and calamity for all the peoples.

It is thus that we, Soviet people, and, together with us, other peoples as well, understand the questions of war and peace. I can, in any case, firmly say this for the peoples of the socialist countries, as well as for all progressive people who want peace, happiness, and friendship among peoples.

I see, Mr. President, that you too are not devoid of a sense of anxiety for the fate of the world, of understanding, and of what war entails. What would a war give you? You are threatening us with war. But you well know that the very least which you would receive in reply would be that you would experience the same consequences as those which you sent us. And that must be clear to us, people invested with authority, trust, and responsibility. We must not succumb to intoxication and petty passions, regardless of whether elections are impending in this or that country, or not impending. These are all transient things, but if indeed war should break out, then it would not be in our power to stop it, for such is the logic of war. I have participated in two wars and know that war ends when it has rolled through cities and villages, everywhere sowing death and destruction.

In the name of the Soviet Government and the Soviet people, I assure you that your conclusions regarding offensive weapons on Cuba are groundless. It is apparent from what you have written me that our conceptions are different on this score, or rather, we have different estimates of these or those military means. Indeed, in reality, the same forms of weapons can have different interpretations.

You are a military man and, I hope, will understand me. Let us take for example a simple cannon. What sort of means is this: offensive or defensive? A cannon is a defensive means if it is set up to defend boundaries or a fortified area. But if one concentrates artillery, and adds to it the necessary number of troops, then the same cannons do become an offensive means, because they prepare and clear the way for infantry to attack. The same happens with missile-nuclear weapons as well, with any type of this weapon.

You are mistaken if you think that any of our means on Cuba are offensive. However, let us not quarrel now. It is apparent that I will not be able to convince you of this. But I say to you: you, Mr. President, are a military man and should understand: one can attack, if one has on one's territory even an enormous quantity of missiles of various effective radi-

uses and various power, but using only these means. These missiles are a means of extermination and destruction. But one cannot attack with these missiles, even nuclear missiles of a power of 100 megatons because only people, troops, can attack. Without people, any means however powerful cannot be offensive.

How can one, consequently, give such a completely incorrect interpretation as you are now giving, to the effect that some sort of means on Cuba are offensive. All the means located there, and I assure you of this, have a defensive character, are on Cuba solely for the purposes of defense, and we have sent them to Cuba at the request of the Cuban Government. You, however, say that these are offensive means.

But, Mr. President, do you really seriously think that Cuba can attack the United States and that even we together with Cuba can attack you for the territory of Cuba? Can you really think that way? How is it possible? We do not understand this. Has something so new appeared in military strategy that one can think that it is possible to attack thus, I say precisely attack, and not destroy, since barbarians, people who have lost their sense, destroy.

I believe that you have no basis to think this way. You can regard us with distrust, but, in any case, you can be calm in this regard, that we are of sound mind and understand perfectly well that if we attack you, you will respond the same way. But you too will receive the same that you hurl against us. And I think that you also understand this. My conversation with you in Vienna gives me the right to talk to you this way.

This indicates that we are normal people, that we correctly understand and correctly evaluate the situation. Consequently, how can we permit the incorrect actions which you ascribe to us? Only lunatics or suicides, who themselves want to perish and to destroy the whole world before they die, could do this. We, however, want to live and do not at all want to destroy your country. We want something quite different: to compete with your country on a peaceful basis. We quarrel

with you, we have differences on ideological questions. But our view of the world consists in this, that ideological questions, as well as economic problems, should be solved not by military means, they must be solved on the basis of peaceful competition, i.e., as this is understood in capitalist society, on the basis of competition. We have proceeded and are proceeding from the fact that the peaceful coexistence of the two different social-political systems, now existing in the world, is necessary, that it is necessary to assure a stable peace. That is the sort of principle we hold.

You have now proclaimed piratical measures, which were employed in the Middle Ages, when ships proceeding in international waters were attacked, and you have called this “a quarantine” around Cuba. Our vessels, apparently, will soon enter the zone which your Navy is patrolling. I assure you that these vessels, now bound for Cuba, are carrying the most innocent peaceful cargoes. Do you really think that we only occupy ourselves with the carriage of so-called offensive weapons, atomic and hydrogen bombs? Although perhaps your military people imagine that these (cargoes) are some sort of special type of weapon, I assure you that they are the most ordinary peaceful products.

Consequently, Mr. President, let us show good sense. I assure you that on those ships, which are bound for Cuba, there are no weapons at all. The weapons which were necessary for the defense of Cuba are already there. I do not want to say that there were not any shipments of weapons at all. No, there were such shipments. But now Cuba has already received the necessary means of defense.

I don't know whether you can understand me and believe me. But I should like to have you believe in yourself and to agree that one cannot give way to passions; it is necessary to control them. And in what direction are events now developing? If you stop the vessels, then, as you yourself know, that would be piracy. If we started to do that with regard to your ships, then you would also be as indignant as we and the whole world now are. One cannot give another interpretation to such actions,

because one cannot legalize lawlessness. If this were permitted, then there would be no peace, there would also be no peaceful coexistence. We should then be forced to put into effect the necessary measures of a defensive character to protect our interests in accordance with international law. Why should this be done? To what would all this lead?

Let us normalize relations. We have received an appeal from the Acting Secretary General of the UN, U Thant, with his proposals. I have already answered him. His proposals come to this, that our side should not transport armaments of any kind to Cuba during a certain period of time, while negotiations are being conducted—and we are ready to enter such negotiations—and the other side should not undertake any sort of piratical actions against vessels engaged in navigation on the high seas. I consider these proposals reasonable. This would be a way out of the situation which has been created, which would give the peoples the possibility of breathing calmly. You have asked what happened, what evoked the delivery of weapons to Cuba? You have spoken about this to our Minister of Foreign Affairs. I will tell you frankly, Mr. President, what evoked it.

We were very grieved by the fact—I spoke about it in Vienna—that a landing took place, that an attack on Cuba was committed, as a result of which many Cubans perished. You yourself told me then that this had been a mistake. I respected that explanation. You repeated it to me several times, pointing out that not everybody occupying a high position would acknowledge his mistakes as you had done. I value such frankness. For my part, I told you that we too possess no less courage; we also acknowledged those mistakes which had been committed during the history of our state, and not only acknowledged, but sharply condemned them.

If you are really concerned about the peace and welfare of your people, and this is your responsibility as President, then I, as the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, am concerned for my people. Moreover, the preservation of world peace should be our joint

concern, since if, under contemporary conditions, war should break out, it would be a war not only between the reciprocal claims, but a worldwide cruel and destructive war.

Why have we proceeded to assist Cuba with military and economic aid? The answer is: we have proceeded to do so only for reasons of humanitarianism. At one time, our people itself had a revolution, when Russia was still a backward country. We were attacked then. We were the target of attack by many countries. The USA participated in that adventure. This has been recorded by participants against our country. A whole book has been written about this by General [William Sidney] Graves, who, at that time, commanded the U.S. expeditionary corps. Graves called it American Adventure in Siberia.

We know how difficult it is to accomplish a revolution and how difficult it is to reconstruct a country on new foundations. We sincerely sympathize with Cuba and the Cuban people, but we are not interfering in questions of domestic structure, we are not interfering in their affairs. The Soviet Union desires to help the Cubans build their life as they themselves wish and that others should not hinder them.

You once said that the United States was not preparing an invasion. But you also declared that you sympathized with the Cuban counterrevolutionary emigrants, that you support them and would help them to realize their plans against the present government of Cuba. It is also not a secret to anyone that the threat of armed attack, aggression, has constantly hung, and continues to hang over Cuba. It was only this which impelled us to respond to the request of the Cuban government to furnish it aid for the strengthening of the defensive capacity of this country.

If assurances were given by the President and government of the United States that the United States itself would not participate in an attack on Cuba and would restrain others from actions of this sort, if you would recall your fleet, this would immediately change everything. I am not speaking for Fidel Cas-

tro, but I think that he and the government of Cuba, evidently, would declare demobilization and would appeal to the people to get down to peaceful labor. Then, too, the question of armaments would disappear, since, if there is no threat, then armaments are a burden for every people. Then, too, the question of the destruction, not only of the armaments which you call offensive, but of all other armaments as well, would look different.

I spoke in the name of the Soviet Government in the United Nations and introduced a proposal for the disbandment of all armies and for the destruction of all armaments. How then can I now count on those armaments?

Armaments bring only disasters. When one accumulates them, this damages the economy, and if one put them to use, then they destroy people on both sides. Consequently, only a madman can believe that armaments are the principal means in the life of society. No, they are an enforced loss of human energy, and what is more are for the destruction of man himself. If people do not show wisdom, then in the final analysis they will come to a clash, like blind moles, and then reciprocal extermination will begin.

Let us therefore show statesmanlike wisdom. I propose: we, for our part, will declare that our ships, bound for Cuba, will not carry any kind of armaments. You would declare that the United States will not invade Cuba with its forces and will not support any sort of forces which might intend to carry out an invasion of Cuba. Then the necessity for the presence of our military specialists in Cuba would disappear.

Mr. President, I appeal to you to weigh well what the aggressive, piratical actions, which you have declared the USA intends to carry out in international waters, would lead to. You yourself know that any sensible man simply cannot agree with this, cannot recognize your right to such actions.

If you did this, as the first step towards the unleashing of war, well then, it is evident that nothing else is left to us but to accept this challenge of yours. If, however, you have not

lost your self-control and sensibly conceive what this might lead to, then, Mr. President, we and you ought not now to pull on the ends of the rope in which you have tied the knot of war, because the more the two of us pull, the tighter that knot will be tied. And a moment may come when that knot will be tied so tight that even he who tied it will not have the strength to untie it, and then it will be necessary to cut that knot. And what that would mean is not for me to explain to you, because you yourself understand perfectly of what terrible forces our countries dispose.

Consequently, if there is no intention to tighten that knot and thereby to doom the world to the catastrophe of thermonuclear war, then let us not only relax the forces pulling on the ends of the rope, let us take measures to untie that knot. We are ready for this.

We welcome all forces which stand on positions of peace. Consequently, I expressed gratitude to Mr. Bertrand Russell, too, who manifests alarm and concern for the fate of the world, and I readily responded to the appeal of the Acting Secretary General of the UN, U Thant.

There, Mr. President, are my thoughts, which, if you agreed with them, could put an end to that tense situation which is disturbing all peoples.

These thoughts are dictated by a sincere desire to relieve the situation, to remove the threat of war.

Respectfully yours,
Nikita Khrushchev

Letter from Chairman Khrushchev to President Kennedy, October 27, 1962

Dear Mr. President:

It is with great satisfaction that I studied your reply to Mr. U Thant on the adoption of measures in order to avoid contact by our ships and thus avoid irreparable fatal consequences. This reasonable step on your part persuades me that you are showing solicitude

for the preservation of peace, and I note this with satisfaction.

I have already said that the only concern of our people and government and myself personally as chairman of the Council of Ministers is to develop our country and have it hold a worthy place among people of the world in economic competition, advance of culture and arts, and the rise in people's living standards. This is the loftiest and most necessary field for competition which will only benefit both the winner and loser, because this benefit is peace and an increase in the facilities by means of which man lives and obtains pleasure.

In your statement, you said that the main aim lies not only in reaching agreement and adopting measures to avert contact of our ships, and, consequently, a deepening of the crisis, which because of this contact can spark off the fire of military conflict after which any talks would be superfluous because other forces and other laws would begin to operate—the laws of war. I agree with you that this is only a first step. The main thing is to normalize and stabilize the situation in the world between states and between people.

I understand your concern for the security of the United States, Mr. President, because this is the first duty of the president. However, these questions are also uppermost in our minds. The same duties rest with me as chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers. You have been worried over our assisting Cuba with arms designed to strengthen its defensive potential—precisely defensive potential—because Cuba, no matter what weapons it had, could not compare with you since these are different dimensions, the more so given up-to-date means of extermination.

Our purpose has been and is to help Cuba, and no one can challenge the humanity of our motives aimed at allowing Cuba to live peacefully and develop as its people desire. You want to relieve your country from danger and this is understandable. However, Cuba also wants this. All countries want to relieve themselves from danger. But how can we, the

Soviet Union and our government, assess your actions which, in effect, mean that you have surrounded the Soviet Union with military bases, surrounded our allies with military bases, set up military bases literally around our country, and stationed your rocket weapons at them? This is no secret. High-placed American officials demonstratively declare this. Your rockets are stationed in Britain and in Italy and pointed at us. Your rockets are stationed in Turkey.

You are worried over Cuba. You say that it worries you because it lies at a distance of ninety miles across the sea from the shores of the United States. However, Turkey lies next to us. Our sentinels are pacing up and down and watching each other. Do you believe that you have the right to demand security for your country and the removal of such weapons that your qualify as offensive, while not recognizing this right for us?

You have stationed devastating rocket weapons, which you call offensive, in Turkey literally right next to us. How then does recognition of our equal military possibilities tally with such unequal relations between our great states? This does not tally at all.

It is good, Mr. President, that you agreed for our representatives to meet and begin talks, apparently with the participation of U.N. Acting Secretary General U Thant. Consequently, to some extent, he assumes the role of intermediary, and we believe that he can cope with the responsible mission if, of course, every side that is drawn into this conflict shows good will.

I think that one could rapidly eliminate the conflict and normalize the situation. Then people would heave a sigh of relief, considering that the statesmen who bear the responsibility have sober minds, an awareness of their responsibility, and an ability to solve complicated problems and not allow matters to slide to the disaster of war.

This is why I make this proposal: We agree to remove those weapons from Cuba which you regard as offensive weapons. We agree to do this and to state this commitment in the

United Nations. Your representatives will make a statement to the effect that the United States, on its part, bearing in mind the anxiety and concern of the Soviet state, will evacuate its analogous weapons from Turkey. Let us reach an understanding on what time you and we need to put this into effect.

After this, representatives of the UN Security Council could control on-the-spot the fulfillment of these commitments. Of course, it is necessary that the Governments of Cuba and Turkey would allow these representatives to come to their countries and check fulfillment of this commitment, which each side undertakes. Apparently, it would be better if these representatives enjoyed the trust of the Security Council and ours—the United States and the Soviet Union—as well as of Turkey and Cuba. I think that it will not be difficult to find such people who enjoy the trust and respect of all interested sides.

We, having assumed this commitment in order to give satisfaction and hope to the peoples of Cuba and Turkey and to increase their confidence in their security, will make a statement in the Security Council to the effect that the Soviet Government gives a solemn pledge to respect the integrity of the frontiers and the sovereignty of Turkey, not to intervene in its domestic affairs, not to invade Turkey, not to make available its territory as a place d'armes for such invasion, and also will restrain those who would think of launching an aggression against Turkey either from Soviet territory or from the territory of other states bordering on Turkey.

The U.S. Government will make the same statement in the Security Council with regard to Cuba. It will declare that the United States will respect the integrity of the frontiers of Cuba, its sovereignty, undertakes not to intervene in its domestic affairs, not to invade and not to make its territory available as [a] place d'armes for the invasion of Cuba, and also will restrain those who would think of launching an aggression against Cuba either from U.S. territory or from the territory of other states bordering on Cuba.

Of course, for this we would have to reach agreement with you and to arrange for some deadline. Let us agree to give some time, but not to delay, two or three weeks, not more than a month.

The weapons on Cuba, that you have mentioned and which, as you say, alarm you, are in the hands of Soviet officers. Therefore any accidental use of them whatsoever to the detriment of the United States of America is excluded. These means are stationed in Cuba at the request of the Cuban Government and only in defensive aims. Therefore, if there is no invasion of Cuba, or an attack on the Soviet Union, or other of our allies then, of course, these means do not threaten anyone and will not threaten. For they do not pursue offensive aims.

If you accept my proposal, Mr. President, we would send our representatives to New York, to the United Nations, and would give them exhaustive instructions to order to come to terms sooner. If you would also appoint your men and give them appropriate instructions, this problem could be solved soon.

Why would I like to achieve this? Because the entire world is now agitated and expects reasonable actions from us. The greatest pleasure for all the people would be an announcement on our agreement, on nipping in the bud the conflict that has arisen. I attach a great importance to such understanding because it might be a good beginning and, specifically, facilitate a nuclear test ban agreement. The problem of tests could be solved simultaneously, not linking one with the other, because they are different problems. However, it is important to reach an understanding to both these problems in order to make a good gift to the people, to let them rejoice in the news that a nuclear test ban agreement has also been reached and thus there will be no further contamination of the atmosphere. Your and our positions on this issue are very close.

All this, possibly, would serve as a good impetus to searching for mutually acceptable agreements on other disputed issues, too, on which there is an exchange of opinion be-

tween us. These problems have not yet been solved, but they wait for an urgent solution which would clear the international atmosphere. We are ready for this.

These are my proposals, Mr. President.

Respectfully yours,

Nikita Khrushchev

Letter from President Kennedy to Chairman Khrushchev, October 27, 1962

I have read your letter of October 26th with great care and welcomed the statement of your desire to seek a prompt solution to the problem. The first thing that needs to be done, however, is for work to cease on offensive missile bases in Cuba and for all weapons systems in Cuba capable of offensive use to be rendered inoperable, under effective United Nations arrangements.

Assuming this is done promptly, I have given my representatives in New York instructions that will permit them to work out this weekend—in cooperation with the Acting Secretary General and your representative—an arrangement for a permanent solution to the Cuban problem along the lines suggested in your letter of October 26th. As I read your letter, the key elements of your proposals—which seem generally acceptable as I understand them—are as follows:

1) You would agree to remove these weapons systems from Cuba under appropriate United Nations observation and supervision; and undertake, with suitable safeguards, to halt the further introduction of such weapons systems into Cuba.

2) We, on our part, would agree—upon the establishment of adequate arrangements through the United Nations to ensure the carrying out and continuation of these commitments—(a) to remove promptly the quarantine measures now in effect and (b) to give assurances against an invasion of Cuba. I am confident that other nations of the Western Hemisphere would be prepared to do likewise.

If you will give your representative similar instructions, there is no reason why we should not be able to complete these arrangements and announce them to the world within a couple of days. The effect of such a settlement on easing world tensions would enable us to work toward a more general arrangement regarding “other armaments,” as proposed in your second letter which you made public. I would like to say again that the United States is very much interested in reducing tensions and halting the arms race; and if your letter signifies that you are prepared to discuss a detente affecting NATO and the Warsaw Pact, we are quite prepared to consider with our allies any useful proposals.

But the first ingredient, let me emphasize, is the cessation of work on missile sites in Cuba and measures to render such weapons inoperable, under effective international guarantees. The continuation of this threat, or a prolonging of this discussion concerning Cuba by linking these problems to the broader questions of European and world security, would surely lead to an intensified situation on the Cuban crisis and a grave risk to the peace of the world. For this reason I hope we can quickly agree along the lines outlined in this letter and in your letter of October 26th.

John F. Kennedy

Excerpt of a Letter from Chairman Khrushchev to President Kennedy, October 28, 1962

Dear Mr. President:

I have received your message of 27 October. I express my satisfaction and thank you for the sense of proportion you have displayed and for realization of the responsibility which now devolves on you for the preservation of the peace of the world.

I regard with great understanding your concern and the concern of the United States people in connection with the fact that the weapons you describe as offensive are formidable weapons indeed. Both you and we

understand what kind of weapons these are.

In order to eliminate as rapidly as possible the conflict which endangers the cause of peace, to give an assurance to all people who crave peace, and to reassure the American people, all of whom, I am certain, also want peace, as do the people of the Soviet Union, the Soviet Government, in addition to earlier instructions on the discontinuation of further work on weapons constructions sites, has given a new order to dismantle the arms which you described as offensive, and to crate and return them to the Soviet Union.

Mr. President, I should like to repeat what I had already written to you in my earlier messages—that the Soviet Government has given economic assistance to the Republic of Cuba, as well as arms, because Cuba and the Cuban people were constantly under the continuous threat of an invasion of Cuba.

A piratic vessel had shelled Havana. They say that this shelling was done by irresponsible Cuban emigres. Perhaps so. However, the question is from where did they shoot. It is a fact that these Cubans have no territory, they are fugitives from their country, and they have no means to conduct military operations.

This means that someone put into their hands these weapons for shelling Havana and for piracy in the Caribbean in Cuban territorial waters. It is impossible in our time not to notice a piratic ship, considering the concentration in the Caribbean of American ships from which everything can be seen and observed.

In these conditions, pirate ships freely roam around and shell Cuba and make piratic attacks on peaceful cargo ships. It is known that they even shelled a British cargo ship. In a word, Cuba was under the continuous threat of aggressive forces, which did not conceal their intention to invade its territory.

The Cuban people want to build their life in their own interests without external interference. This is their right, and they cannot be blamed for wanting to be masters of their own country and disposing of the fruits of their own labor. The threat of invasion of Cuba and

all other schemes for creating tension over China are designed to strike the Cuban people with a sense of insecurity, intimidate them, and prevent them from peacefully building their new life.

Mr. President, I should like to say clearly once more that we could not remain indifferent to this. The Soviet Government decided to render assistance to Cuba with means of defense against aggression—only with means for defense purposes. We have supplied the defense means which you describe as offensive means. We have supplied them to prevent an attack on Cuba—to prevent rash acts.

I regard with respect and trust the statement you made in your message of 27 October 1962 that there would be no attack, no invasion of Cuba, and not only on the part of the United States, but also on the part of other nations of the Western Hemisphere, as you said in your same message. Then the motives which induced us to render assistance of such a kind to Cuba disappear.

It is for this reason that we instructed our officers—these means as I had already informed you earlier are in the hands of the Soviet officers—to take appropriate measures to discontinue construction of aforementioned facilities, to dismantle them, and to return them to the Soviet Union. As I had informed you in the letter of 27 October, we are prepared to reach agreement to enable UN representatives to verify the dismantling of these means. Thus in view of the assurances you have given and our instructions on dismantling, there is every condition for eliminating the present conflict.

Respectfully yours,
N. Khrushchev

**Letter from Prime
Minister Castro to Acting
Secretary General U Thant,
October 28, 1962**

U Thant
Acting Secretary General of the United Nations

With reference to the statement made by

Mr. John F. Kennedy, President of the United States, in a letter addressed to Mr. Nikita Khrushchev, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the U.S.S.R., to the effect that the United States would agree, after suitable arrangements had been made through the United Nations, to remove the blockade now in effect and to give guarantees against an invasion of Cuba, and with reference to the decision, announced by Mr. Nikita Khrushchev, to withdraw strategic defence weapons facilities from Cuban territory, the Revolutionary Government of Cuba wishes to make the following statement:

The guarantees mentioned by President Kennedy that there will be no aggression against Cuba will be ineffective unless, in addition to the removal of the naval blockade which he promises, the following measures, inter alia, are adopted:

1. Cessation of the economic blockade and of all the measures of commercial and economic pressure being carried out by the United States against our country throughout the world.

2. Cessation of all subversive activities, of the dropping and landing of weapons and explosives by air and sea, of the organization of invasions by mercenaries, and of the infiltration of spies and saboteurs—all of which activities are being carried on from the territory of the United States and certain accomplice countries.

3. Cessation of the piratical attacks being carried out from bases in the United States and Puerto Rico.

4. Cessation of all violations of our air space and territorial waters by United States aircraft and warships.

5. Withdrawal of the naval base of Guantanamo and return of the Cuban territory occupied by the United States.

Accept, Sir, the assurance of my highest consideration.

Major Fidel Castro Ruz

Prime Minister of the Revolutionary Government of Cuba

Excerpt of a Letter from Chairman Khrushchev to Prime Minister Castro, October 30, 1962

Dear Comrade Fidel Castro:

....We understand that for you certain difficulties may have emerged as a consequence of the promises we made to the United States to withdraw the missile bases from Cuba in exchange for their promise to abandon their plans to invade Cuba and to prevent their allies in the Western Hemisphere from doing so, to end their so-called “quarantine”—their blockade of Cuba. This commitment has led to an end to the conflict in the Caribbean, a conflict which implied, as you can well understand, a superpower confrontation and its transformation into a world war where the missiles and thermonuclear weapons would have been used. According to our ambassador, certain Cubans feel that the Cuban people would prefer a different kind of statement, one that would not deal with the withdrawal of missiles. It is possible that such feelings exist among the people. But we, politicians and heads of state, are the people’s leaders and the people do not know everything. This is why we must march as the head of the people. Then they will follow and respect us.

If, by giving in to popular sentiment, we had allowed ourselves to be swept up by the more inflamed sectors of the populace, and if we had refused to reach a reasonable agreement with the government of the USA, war would have probably broken out, resulting in millions of deaths. Those who survived would have blamed the leaders for not having taken the measures that would have avoided this war of extermination.

The prevention of war and of an attack on Cuba did not depend only on the measures taken by our governments, but also on the analysis and examination of the enemy’s actions near your territory. In short, the situation had to be considered as a whole.

Some people say that we did not consult sufficiently with each other before taking the decision of which you know.

In fact, we consider that consultations did take place, dear Comrade Fidel Castro, since we received your cables, one more alarming than the other, and finally your cable of October 27 where you said that you were almost certain that an attack against Cuba was imminent. According to you it was only a matter of time: 24 or 72 hours.

Having received this very alarming cable from you, and knowing of your courage, we believed the alert to be totally justified.

Wasn’t that consultation on your part? We interpreted that cable as a sign of maximum alert. But if we had carried on with our consultations in such conditions, knowing that the bellicose and unbridled militarists of the United States wanted to seize the occasion to attack Cuba, we would have been wasting our time and the strike could have taken place.

We think that the presence of our strategic missiles in Cuba has polarized the attention of the imperialists. They were afraid that they would be used, which is why they risked wanting to eliminate them either by bombing them or by invading Cuba. And we must recognize that they had the capability to put them out of action. This is why, I repeat, your sense of alarm was totally justified.

In your cable of October 27 you proposed that we be the first to carry out a nuclear strike against the enemy’s territory. Naturally you understand where that would lead us. It would not be a simple strike, but the start of a thermonuclear world war.

Dear Comrade Fidel Castro, I find your proposal to be wrong, even though I understand your reasons.

We have lived through a very grave moment, a global thermonuclear war could have broken out. Of course the United States would have suffered enormous losses, but the Soviet Union and the whole socialist bloc would have also suffered greatly. It is even difficult to say how things would have ended for the Cuban people. First of all, Cuba would have burned in the fires of war. Without a doubt the Cuban people would have fought courageously but, also without a doubt, the Cuban people

would have perished heroically. We struggle against imperialism, not in order to die, but to draw on all of our potential, to lose as little as possible, and later to win more, so as to be a victor and make communism triumph.

The measures which we have adopted have allowed us to reach the goal which we had set when we decided to send the missiles to Cuba. We have extracted from the United States the commitment not to invade Cuba and not to allow their Latin American allies to do so. We have accomplished all of this without a nuclear war.

We believe that we must take advantage of all the possibilities to defend Cuba, to strengthen its independence and sovereignty, to thwart military aggression, and to prevent a global thermonuclear war in the present stage.

And we have succeeded.

Of course, we have made concessions, we have made certain commitments. We have acted on the principle of reciprocal concessions. The United States has also made concessions, it has committed itself publicly, before the whole world, not to attack Cuba.

Therefore, if we compare a U.S. attack and thermonuclear war on the one hand, and on the other hand the commitments made, the reciprocal concessions, the guarantee of the inviolability of the Republic of Cuba, and the prevention of a world war, then I think that the conclusion is clear.

N. Khrushchev

Excerpt of a Letter from Prime Minister Castro to Chairman Khrushchev, October 31, 1962

Dear Comrade Khrushchev:

I received your letter of October 30. According to you, we were consulted before you took the decision to withdraw the strategic missiles. You justify this statement by referring to the alarming news coming out of Cuba and to my last cable of October 27. I do not know what information you received; I am responding only to the message I sent on the night of the 26th, and which you received on the 27th.

What we did in the face of events, Comrade Khrushchev, was to prepare ourselves and be ready to fight. In Cuba there was only one type of alert: an alert in the face of imminent combat. When, according to us, the imperialist attack was imminent, I thought it appropriate to reveal this to you and to alert both the Soviet government and the Soviet command since there were Soviet forces determined to fight with us in defending the Republic of Cuba against an external aggression, which we could not have stopped but against which we could have resisted.

I told you that the morale of our people was very high and that we would resist aggression heroically. At the end of my message I told you that we would wait for the events calmly.

Danger could not impress us because we had seen it hover over our country for a long time, in a way, we were used to it.

The Soviets who were with us know how admirable the stance of our people during the crisis has been, and of the great fraternity that has developed between men of our two peoples in these decisive hours. Many Cubans and Soviets, who were ready to die in maximum dignity, shed tears when they learned of the surprising decision, unexpected and almost unconditional, to withdraw the weapons.

You perhaps do not know of the extent to which the Cuban people were ready to fulfill their duty towards their Motherland and toward humanity.

I was not unaware, when I wrote them, that the terms I used in my letter could be misinterpreted, and that is what happened: maybe because you did not read them attentively, maybe because of the translation, maybe because I tried to say too much in too few lines. Nevertheless, I did not hesitate to do it. Do you think, Comrade Khrushchev, that we were selfishly thinking of ourselves, of our generous people who were prepared to immolate themselves, not without thought, but fully aware of the risk they were running?

No, Comrade Khrushchev, rarely in history—I can even say never—has any people

run such a danger, never has a people been so ready to fight and die with such a universal sense of duty.

We knew, don't think that we didn't, that we would have been exterminated, as you insinuate in your letter, in the case of thermonuclear war. That would, nevertheless, not have prompted us to ask you to withdraw the missiles, to ask you to concede. Do you by any chance think that we wanted such a war? But how to avoid it if an invasion took place? That, precisely, was a possibility, since the imperialists were blocking every solution and their demands, in our opinion, were unacceptable to the USSR and to Cuba.

Fraternally,
Fidel Castro

Excerpt of a Letter from Chairman Khrushchev to President Kennedy, December 10, 1962

Dear Mr. President,

I will tell you frankly that we have removed our means from Cuba relying on your assurance that the United States and its allies will not invade Cuba. Those means really had the purpose of defending the sovereignty of Cuba and therefore after your assurance they lost their purpose. We hope and we would like to believe—I spoke of that publicly too, as you know—that you will adhere to the commitments which you have taken, as strictly as we do with regard to our commitments. We, Mr. President, have already fulfilled our commitments concerning the removal of our missiles and IL-28 planes from Cuba and we did it even ahead of time. It is obvious that fulfillment by you of your commitments cannot be as clearly demonstrated as it was done by us since your commitments are of a long-term nature. But it is important to fulfill them and to do everything so that no doubts are sown from the very start that they will not be fulfilled.

We believe that the guarantees for non-invasion of Cuba given by you will be maintained and not only in the period of your

stay in the White House, that, to use an expression, goes without saying. We believe that you will be able to receive a mandate at the next election too, that is that you will be the U.S. President for six years, which would appeal to us. At our times, six years in world politics is a long period of time and during that period we could create good conditions for peaceful coexistence on earth and this would be highly appreciated by the peoples of our countries as well as by all other peoples.

Therefore, Mr. President, I would like to express a wish that you follow the right way, as we do, in appraising the situation. Now it is of special importance to provide for the possibility of an exchange of opinion through confidential channels which you and I have set up and which we use. But the confidential nature of our personal relations will depend on whether you fulfill—as we did—the commitments taken by you and give instructions to your representatives in New York to formalize these commitments in appropriate documents. This is needed in order that all the peoples be sure that tension in the Caribbean is a matter of yesterday and that now normal conditions have been really created in the world. And for this it is necessary to fix the assumed commitments in the documents of both sides and register them with the United Nations.

Respectfully yours,
N. Khrushchev

Excerpt of a Letter from President Kennedy to Chairman Khrushchev, December 14, 1962

Dear Mr. Chairman:

...You refer to the importance of my statements on an invasion of Cuba and of our intention to fulfill them, so that no doubts are sown from the start. I have already stated my position publicly in my press conference on November 20th, and I am glad that this statement appears to have your understanding; we have never wanted to be driven by the acts of others into war in Cuba. The other side of the coin, however, is that we do need

to have adequate assurances that all offensive weapons are removed from Cuba and are not reintroduced, and that Cuba itself commits no aggressive acts against any of the nations of the Western Hemisphere. As I understand you, you feel confident that Cuba will not in fact engage in such aggressive acts, and of course I already have your own assurance about the offensive weapons. So I myself should suppose that you would accept our position—but it is probably better to leave final discussion of these matters to our representatives in New York. I quite agree with you that the larger part of the crisis has now been ended and we should not permit others to stand in the way of promptly settling the rest with further acrimony...

John F. Kennedy

Supplementary Resources

Books

Beschloss, Michael R. *The Crisis Years: Kennedy and Khrushchev, 1960-1963* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991). 816 pages.

Blight, James G., and David A. Welch, eds. *Intelligence and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1998). 234 pages.

Blight, James G., Bruce J. Allyn, and David A. Welch, *Cuba on the Brink: Castro, The Missile Crisis, and the Soviet Collapse* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002). 537 pages.

Chang, Laurence, and Peter Kornbluh, eds. *The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: A National Security Archive Documents Reader* (New York: The New Press, 1998). 429 pages.

May, Ernest R., and Philip D. Zelikow, eds. *The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House during the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997). 728 pages.

World Wide Web

Critical Oral History: The Cuban Missile Crisis and the Risk of Nuclear War in the 21st Century <www.watsoninstitute.org/project_detail.cfm?id=33> Information about cutting edge research on the missile crisis.

The National Security Archive <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri> Collections of documents and photos, as well as recordings of ExComm meetings.

The Cold War International History Project <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1409&fuseaction=library.Collection&class=New%20Evidence%20on%20the%20Cuban%20Missile%20Crisis> Newly available documents, many from the Soviet perspective, and analysis of events.

The Miller Center of Public Affairs White House Tapes <<http://www.whitehousetapes.org>> Transcripts and audio from President Kennedy's recordings, plus online exhibits to help students and teachers navigate the volume of material available.

90 Miles <<http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2003/90miles/index.html>> A PBS show on Cuba. Many resources on Cuba and U.S.-Cuba relations, both current and historical.

The Choices Program <<http://www.choices.edu/cmc.cfm>> Updated resources and links.

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THE CHOICES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY EDUCATION PROGRAM is a program of the Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown University. CHOICES was established to help citizens think constructively about foreign policy issues, to improve participatory citizenship skills, and to encourage public judgement on policy issues.



The Watson Institute for International Studies was established at Brown University in 1986 to serve as a forum for students, faculty, visiting scholars, and policy practitioners who are committed to analyzing contemporary global problems and developing initiatives to address them.

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The Choices Approach to Historical Turning Points

Choices curricula are designed to make complex international issues understandable and meaningful for students. Using a student-centered approach, Choices units develop critical thinking and an understanding of the significance of history in our lives today—essential ingredients of responsible citizenship.

Teachers say the collaboration and interaction in Choices units are highly motivating for students. Studies consistently demonstrate that students of all abilities learn best when they are actively engaged with the material. Cooperative learning invites students to take pride in their own contributions and in the group product, enhancing students' confidence as learners. Research demonstrates that students using the Choices approach learn the factual information presented as well as or better than those using a lecture-discussion format. Choices units offer students with diverse abilities and learning styles the opportunity to contribute, collaborate, and achieve.

Choices units on historical turning points include student readings, a framework of policy options, primary sources, suggested lesson plans, and resources for structuring cooperative learning, role plays, and simulations. Students are challenged to:

- understand historical context
- recreate historical debate
- analyze and evaluate multiple perspectives at a turning point in history
- analyze primary sources that provide a grounded understanding of the moment
- understand the internal logic of a viewpoint
- identify the conflicting values represented by different points of view
- develop and articulate original viewpoints
- recognize relationships between history and current issues
- communicate in written and oral presentations
- collaborate with peers

Choices curricula offer teachers a flexible resource for covering course material while actively engaging students and developing skills in critical thinking, persuasive writing, and informed citizenship. The instructional activities that are central to Choices units can be valuable components in any teacher's repertoire of effective teaching strategies.

Historical Understanding

Each Choices curriculum resource provides students with extensive information about an historical issue. By providing students only the information available at the time, Choices units help students to understand that historical events often involved competing and highly contested views. The Choices approach emphasizes that historical outcomes were hardly inevitable. This approach helps students to develop a more sophisticated understanding of history.

Each Choices unit presents the range of options that were considered at a turning point in history. Students understand and analyze these options through a role play activity.

In each unit the setting is the same as it was during the actual event. Students may be role playing a meeting of the National Security Council, a town gathering, or a Senate debate. Student groups defend their assigned policy options and, in turn, are challenged with questions from their classmates playing the role of "decisionmakers" at the time. The ensuing debate demands analysis and evaluation of the conflicting values, interests, and priorities reflected in the options.

The final reading in a Choices historical unit presents the outcome of the debate and reviews subsequent events. The final lesson encourages students to make connections between past and present.

Note To Teachers

Like no other region of the globe, the Caribbean Basin has served as a testing ground for U.S. foreign policy. From the Monroe Doctrine to Cold War containment, from the Big Stick and Dollar Diplomacy to the Good Neighbor Policy and the Alliance for Progress, the countries of the Caribbean and Central America have felt the full weight of their colossal neighbor to the north. U.S. expansion overseas can trace its beginnings to the explosion of the *Maine* and Teddy Roosevelt's charge up San Juan Hill. Over half a century later, our country's struggle with the Soviet Union reached the boiling point during the Cuban missile crisis.

The Cuban Missile Crisis: Considering its Place in Cold War History probes the complex, often troubled, relationship between the United States and Cuba, and examines the crisis that brought the world to the brink of war. The unit analyzes the Cold War dynamics that led to the Cuban missile crisis and examines the decision-making process within the Kennedy administration. It prepares students to consider thoughtfully the causes and ramifications of the Cuban missile crisis.

Suggested Five-Day Lesson Plan: The Teacher Resource Book accompanying this unit contains a day-by-day lesson plan and student activities. The opening lesson introduces students to important milestones in our country's relationship with Cuba and places them in the context of U.S. involvement in the Caribbean and Central America. The second day of the lesson plan focuses on the tangled web of U.S.-Cuban-Soviet relations. On the third and fourth days students engage in a simulation set in October 1962 in which they assume the role of advocates of three options the Kennedy administration faced. The fifth day contains an exercise that explores the Cuban point of view about the crisis. An optional lesson examines the role of the letters exchanged between Nikita Khrushchev and John F. Kennedy during the crisis. A second optional lesson investigates U.S.-Cuban rela-

tions since the missile crisis through political cartoons. You may also find the "Alternative Three-Day Lesson Plan" useful.

- **Alternative Study Guides:** Each section of reading is accompanied by two distinct study guides. The standard study guide is designed to help students harvest the information provided in the readings in preparation for tackling analysis and synthesis within classroom activities. The advanced study guide requires the student to tackle analysis and synthesis prior to class activities.

- **Vocabulary and Concepts:** The readings in *The Cuban Missile Crisis: Considering its Place in Cold War History* address subjects that are complex and challenging. To help your students get the most out of the text, you may want to review with them "Key Terms" found in the Teacher Resource Book (TRB) on page TRB-27 before they begin their assignment. An "Issues Toolbox" is also included on page TRB-28. This provides additional information on key concepts of particular importance.

- **Primary Source Documents:** Materials are included in the student text (pages 38-52) that may be used to supplement lessons.

- **Additional Resources:** More resources are available online at <www.choices.edu/cmc.cfm>. In particular, you may find the collection of web-based lesson plans posted there a useful resource. These lesson plans, developed by classroom teachers, draw on research emerging from fifteen years of international research on the subject.

The lesson plans offered in *The Cuban Missile Crisis: Considering its Place in Cold War History* are provided as a guide. They are designed for traditional class periods of approximately fifty minutes. Those on block schedules will need to make adaptations. Many teachers choose to devote additional time to certain activities. We hope that these suggestions help you in tailoring the unit to fit the needs of your classroom.

Integrating This Unit into Your Curriculum

Units produced by the Choices for the 21st Century Education Program are designed to be integrated into a variety of social studies courses. Below are a few ideas about where *The Cuban Missile Crisis: Considering its Place in Cold War History* might fit into your curriculum.

U.S. History: The U.S. victory in the Spanish-American War at the turn of the century transformed the United States into an imperialist power. The acquisition of Puerto Rico, control over Cuba, and the subsequent opening of the Panama Canal created a new set of interests for U.S. foreign policy. Proponents of naval might pressed for an expansion of the U.S. fleet. American businesses strengthened their presence in the Caribbean Basin. At the same time, anti-imperialist forces warned that the United States was destined to acquire the worst features of the European colonial powers. *The Cuban Missile Crisis: Considering its Place in Cold War History* allows students to assess how our country's experience with imperialism in the Caribbean Basin shaped the U.S. role in the world in the twentieth century.

The Cuban missile crisis stands out as the most dramatic superpower confrontation of the nuclear age. The crisis affords a glimpse into the decision-making process at the highest levels of U.S. and Soviet governments. The strategies, goals, and fears driving the foreign policies of the superpowers emerge clearly from the events of October 1962. At the same time, the Cuban missile crisis offers lessons in political psychology that transcend the tensions of the Cold War. Scholars and policymakers continue to study the crisis for insight into how the presence of nuclear weapons has reshaped the nature of international conflict and heightened the pressures of national leadership.

World History: As the battle lines of the Cold War extended beyond Europe in the 1950s, the Caribbean and Central America increasingly became a region of superpower confrontation. Communist Cuba, in particular, emerged as an international flashpoint and an object of often almost obsessive concern for many U.S. policymakers. Meanwhile, deeply rooted conflicts in Central America and the islands of the Caribbean took on the ideological shadings of the Cold War. *The Cuban Missile Crisis: Considering its Place in Cold War History* offers students a broader understanding of the international consequences of the Cold War and the challenges facing what was once known as the third world.

Latin American History: The history of Latin America, especially the Caribbean and Central America, has been inextricably intertwined with the history of the United States. The U.S. political system initially served as a model, and later as a yardstick, for the republics of Latin America. Economically, the region has been bound to the United States in the twentieth century by trade and investment. U.S. interests have largely circumscribed the foreign policies of Latin American countries. Even in the cultural sphere, U.S. influence has trickled down into the daily lives of Latin Americans. *The Cuban Missile Crisis: Considering its Place in Cold War History* provides an introduction to the complex, multifaceted relationship between the United States and other countries of the Western Hemisphere.

U.S. Influence in the Caribbean and Central America

Objectives:

Students will: Identify the main themes related to U.S. involvement in the Caribbean Basin.

Assess the perspective of Caribbean Basin countries toward the United States.

Collaborate with classmates to develop effective group presentations.

Required Reading:

Before beginning the lesson, students should have read the Introduction and Part I in the student text (pages 1-7) and completed “Study Guide—Part I” in the Teacher Resource Book (TRB 4-5) or “Advanced Study Guide—Part I” (TRB-6).

Handouts:

“Examining U.S. Involvement in the Caribbean and Central America” (TRB-7)

In the Classroom:

1. Forming Small Groups—Divide the class into groups of three to four students. Assign each group one of following eight topics:

Manifest Destiny

Panama Canal

Spanish-American War

Roosevelt Corollary

United Fruit Company

Platt Amendment

Monroe Doctrine

Good Neighbor Policy

2. Student Presentations—Instruct the groups to use the background reading, as well as textbooks and other information sources, to prepare two-to-three minute presentations on their topics. (See “Examining U.S. Involvement in the Caribbean and Central America.”) After students have completed their preparations, call on group spokespersons to make their presentations to the class. You might want to have students place their topics on a timeline.

3. Making Connections—Ask students to focus on drawing connections among the eight topics under consideration. For example, how did the Spanish-American War help pave the way for the construction of the Panama Canal and the growth of the United Fruit Company? What topics have had the greatest impact on the attitudes of people in the Caribbean Basin toward the United States?

Extra Challenge:

Require students to summarize the main points from the presentation of each group on a chart.

Homework:

Students should read Part II of the background reading in the student text (pages 8-14) and complete “Study Guide—Part II” (TRB 9-10) or “Advanced Study Guide—Part II” (TRB-11).

Study Guide—Part I

1. List two reasons the United States took an interest in the Caribbean and Central America.

a.

b.

2. What was Manifest Destiny?

3. How did Manifest Destiny affect U.S. foreign policy toward Mexico?

4. What did President Franklin Pierce declare in the Ostend Manifesto in 1854?

5. The Monroe Doctrine had long served as a warning for _____
_____.

6. List four territories acquired by the United States at the end of the Spanish-American War.

a.

b.

c.

d.

7. What was the Platt Amendment? What were its consequences? Why did it anger Cubans?

Name: _____

8. List two consequences of the construction of the Panama Canal.

a.

b.

9. What was the “Roosevelt Corollary”? Give one example of where it was used and why.

10. United Fruit Company became known as “The Octopus” for its _____ of much of _____ and the Caribbean. By the 1920s, the _____ not only controlled the _____, _____, and _____ of the region, but also played an important role in _____.

11. List three positive effects of American businesses in the Caribbean.

a.

b.

c.

12. List three negative effects of American businesses in the Caribbean.

a.

b.

c.

13. What was the “Good Neighbor Policy”?

Retracing the Path to October 1962

Objectives:

Students will: Identify the tensions in U.S.-Soviet-Cuban relations that contributed to the Cuban missile crisis.

Explore the differences in perspective that divided U.S., Soviet, and Cuban leaders up to 1962.

Required Reading:

Students should have read Part II in the student text (pages 8-14), and completed “Study Guide—Part II” in the Teacher Resource Book (TRB 9-10) or “Advanced Study Guide—Part II” (TRB-11).

Handouts:

“U.S.-Soviet-Cuban Relations—Discussion Questions” (TRB-12)

In the Classroom:

1. Forming Small Groups—Divide the class into groups of four or five students. Assign to each group the role of the United States, Cuba, or the Soviet Union. (In classes of more than fifteen students, each country may be represented by two groups.) Distribute

“U.S.-Soviet-Cuban Relations—Discussion Questions.” Emphasize that students should respond to the questions from the perspective of their assigned country in early October 1962.

2. Clarifying Positions—After the groups have answered the discussion questions, ask them to share their responses with the entire class. Note the differences in interpretation among the three countries. For example, how does each country view the U.S. reaction to the revolution in Cuba? What was the driving force behind the warming relationship between Moscow and Havana? Should U.S. leaders have taken a more conciliatory approach to Castro? Was a collision between the United States and Castro’s Cuba unavoidable?

3. Extra Challenge—Ask students to design posters to represent their assigned perspective.

Homework:

Students should read “October 1962: The Moment of Decision” and “Options in Brief” in the student text (pages 15-18).

Name: _____

Study Guide—Part II

1. What was the top priority for U.S. foreign policy following World War II?

2. The _____ War struggle with the _____ caused the United States to be more concerned about _____ in the Caribbean and Central America than about _____ reform.

3. List two reasons why the United Fruit Company was upset with Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz.
 - a.
 - b.

4. List two reasons why the United States government was concerned about Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz.
 - a.
 - b.

5. List five characteristics of life in Cuba during the government of Fulgencio Batista.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.

6. List three reasons the United States opposed Castro.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

7. What was the Bay of Pigs invasion?

8. What was Operation Mongoose?

9. List two reasons that Fidel Castro had for believing the United States would invade Cuba.

a.

b.

10. To protect Cuba from the _____, Castro turned to the other superpower, the _____.

11. What two steps did the Soviet Premier take to protect Cuba?

a.

b.

12. American policymakers saw the _____ presence in Cuba as a _____ to

U.S. _____. Political pressure at home was mounting in

_____ for Kennedy to _____ against

_____ revolution and the threat of _____ in Latin America.

U.S.-Soviet-Cuban Relations—Discussion Questions

Instructions: Your group has been assigned to represent the viewpoint of either the United States, the Soviet Union, or Cuba in early October 1962. You should complete this worksheet from the perspective of your assigned country. Keep in mind that your responses should be based only on information that was available in early October 1962—just before the events of the Cuban missile crisis unfolded. Be prepared to share your responses with the class.

1. What were the reasons behind U.S. policy toward Fidel Castro during the first three years (1959-1961) of the Cuban revolution?
2. What have been Castro's chief motives for shaping Cuba's domestic and foreign policies since 1959?
3. What were the reasons behind the decision of the United States to support the Bay of Pigs invasion?
4. Explain why Cuba strengthened its ties with the Soviet Union after the Bay of Pigs invasion.

Role-Playing the Three Options: Organization and Preparation

Objectives:

Students will: Analyze the issues that framed the debate on the U.S. response to the Soviet missiles in Cuba.

Identify the core assumptions underlying the options.

Integrate the arguments and beliefs of the options and the background reading into a persuasive, coherent presentation.

Work cooperatively within groups to organize effective presentations.

Required Reading:

Students should have read “October 1962: The Moment of Decision” and “Options in Brief” in the student text (pages 15-18).

Handouts:

“Presenting Your Option” (TRB-14) for option groups

“President Kennedy” (TRB-15) for remaining students

In the Classroom:

1. Planning for Group Work—In order to save time in the classroom, form student groups before beginning Day Three. During the class period, students will be preparing for the Day Four simulation. Remind them to incorporate the background reading into their presentations and questions.

2a. Option Groups—Form three groups of students. Assign an option to each group. Distribute “Presenting Your Option” to the three option groups. Inform students that each option group will be called upon in Day Four to present the case for its assigned option to the president. Explain that option groups should follow the instructions in “Presenting Your Option.” Note that the option groups should begin by assigning each member a role.

2b. President Kennedy—The remainder of the class will represent the role of President Kennedy. Distribute “President Kennedy” to each committee member. While the option groups are preparing their presentations, students playing the role of the president should develop cross-examination questions for Day Three. Remind these students that they are expected to turn in their questions at the end of the simulation.

Suggestions:

Ask the option groups to design a poster or a political cartoon illustrating the best case for their options.

In smaller classes, other teachers or administrators may be invited to play the role of President Kennedy.

Homework:

Students should complete preparations for the simulation.

Presenting Your Option

The Setting: It is October, 1962. You are a member of ExComm, the president's most trusted advisors. A few days ago you learned that the Soviets were working towards placing nuclear missiles on Cuba—some warheads might already be there. You do not know why the Soviets seem to have taken this secret, threatening move.

Your Assignment: Your group represents a point of view within ExComm. Your assignment is to persuade President Kennedy and other ExComm members that your option should be the basis for the U.S. response to Cuba and the Soviet Union. On Day Four, your group will give a three-to-five minute presentation to persuade the president to follow your suggested action plan. You will be judged on

how well you present your option. This worksheet will help you prepare.

Organizing Your Group: Each member of your group will take a specific role and participate in the presentation. Below is a brief explanation of the responsibilities for each role. The **group director** is responsible for organizing the presentation of your group's option. The **security advisor** is responsible for explaining why your option best addresses the security challenges facing the United States in Cuba. The **Soviet Expert** is responsible for explaining why your option best serves the interests of the United States in its relationship with the Soviet Union. The **historian** is responsible for explaining how the lessons of history justify the position of your option.

Questions to Consider

1. How will the Soviets view your option?
2. How will the rest of the world view your option?
3. What is most at risk in this situation? (For instance, is it American lives? U.S. standing in the world? World stability?)
4. What values lie at the root of your option?

President Kennedy: The U.S. Response to Soviet Missiles in Cuba

Your Role: As the president, you consider issues vital to our country's security. As you know, the deployment of Soviet missiles in Cuba is the most serious crisis of the Cold War to date. These presentations will introduce you to three distinct approaches for the U.S. response to these missiles. The decision the president faces is a serious one and of vital importance to the safety of the nation.

Your Assignment: While the three option groups are organizing their presentations, each of you should prepare two questions regarding each of the options. Your teacher will collect these questions at the end of Day Three.

Your questions should be challenging and critical. For example, a good question for Option 1 might be:

Isn't there a danger that diplomacy will take too much time and allow further deployment of Soviet missiles?

On Day Four, the three option groups will present their positions. After their presentations are completed, your teacher will call on you and your fellow committee members to ask questions. The "Evaluation Form" you will receive is designed for you to record your impressions of the options. Part I should be filled out in class after the option groups make their presentations. Part II should be completed as homework. After this activity is concluded, you may be called upon to explain your evaluation of the options.

Role-Playing the Three Options: Debate and Discussion

Objectives:

Students will: Articulate the issues that framed the debate on U.S. policy toward the Soviet missile deployment in Cuba.

Sharpen rhetorical skills through debate and discussion.

Cooperate with classmates in staging a persuasive presentation.

Handouts:

“Evaluation Form” (TRB-17) for the group representing President Kennedy

In the Classroom:

1. Setting the Stage—Organize the room so that the three option groups face a row of desks reserved for the group representing President Kennedy. Distribute “Evaluation Form” to that group. Instruct members of that group to fill out the first part of their “Evaluation Form” during the course of the period. The second part of the worksheet should be completed as homework.

2. Managing the Simulation—Explain that the simulation will begin with three-to-five minute presentations by each option group. Encourage all to speak clearly and convincingly.

3. Guiding Discussion—Following the presentations, invite members of the group representing President Kennedy to ask cross-examination questions. Make sure that each member of this group has an opportunity to ask at least one question. The questions should be evenly distributed among all three option groups. If time permits, encourage members of the option groups to challenge the positions of the other groups. During cross-examination, allow any option group member to respond. (As an alternative approach, permit cross-examination following the presentation of each option.)

Homework:

Students should read the Epilogue in the student text (pages 25-33), and complete “Study Guide—Epilogue” (TRB 20-21) or “Advanced Study Guide—Epilogue” (TRB-22).

Name: _____

Evaluation Form: President Kennedy

Part I

What was the most persuasive argument presented in favor of this Option?

What was the most persuasive argument presented against this Option?

Option 1

Option 1

Option 2

Option 2

Option 3

Option 3

Part II

Which group presented its Option most effectively? Explain your answer.

Examining the Documents of the Cuban Missile Crisis

Objectives:

Students will: Analyze and interpret the most important documents of the missile crisis. Identify the most significant passages in the documents under consideration.

Gain insight into the policy choices facing U.S. and Soviet leaders.

Required Reading:

Students should have read Khrushchev's October 26, 1962, and October 27, 1962, letters to Kennedy in the student text (pages 40-46). In addition, students should have read the Epilogue of the student text (pages 25-33).

In the Classroom:

1. Reviewing the Letters—Ask students to compare the styles of the two Khrushchev letters. Note that the first letter has a more personal, emotional tone, as well as a style that is often rambling and disjointed. In contrast, Khrushchev states his case much more directly and succinctly in the second letter. What were the main differences in the substance of the two letters? Call on students to identify the most meaningful paragraphs of the letters. Most important are paragraphs 16, 22, and 25 in the October 26 letter, and paragraphs 6, 7, 10, 12, and 13 in the October 27 letter.

2. Student Responses—How do students weigh the relative strengths and weaknesses of the United States and the Soviet Union at the time of the missile crisis? Can the classroom consensus be characterized as favoring any particular response to the Soviet Union?

3. Assessing Kennedy's Reply—Instruct students to read Kennedy's actual response of October 27, 1962, in the student text (page 46-47). Remind students that most ExComm members did not believe Khrushchev would accept Kennedy's proposal. What were the factors that led Kennedy to address only the October 26 letter while ignoring the October 27 letter? What was Kennedy's difficulty in considering Khrushchev's proposal in the October 27 letter to trade the removal of missiles from Cuba for the removal of missiles from Turkey? Why did Kennedy and his advisers conclude that the first letter represented Khrushchev's personal sentiments while the second letter reflected a consensus of top Soviet leaders? (Note that some ExComm members saw the second letter as evidence of a power struggle within the Kremlin.) Ask students to assume Khrushchev's perspective in considering Kennedy's response. Should Khrushchev have accepted Kennedy's offer? What were the primary concerns affecting his decision?

The Cuban Point of View and Lessons for Today

Objectives:

Students will: Explore and analyze the Cuban point of view of the events surrounding the missile crisis.

Analyze and interpret the recent historical discoveries about the missile crisis.

Identify lessons for today that emerged from the missile crisis.

Required Reading:

Students should have read the Epilogue in the student text (pages 25-33) and completed “Study Guide—Epilogue” (TRB 20-21) or “Advanced Study Guide—Epilogue (TRB-22).

Handouts:

“Exploring the Cuban Point of View” (TRB-23)

In the Classroom:

1. Reviewing the History—If necessary, review with students the crucial junctures after the United States decided to impose a blockade. Ask students to identify the moment they believe that the United States came closest to war. What were the main differences in the substance of the two letters from Khrushchev to Kennedy? Why was President Kennedy so sensitive about not making a public trade of the Jupiter Missiles?

2. Exploring the Cuban Point of View—Distribute “Exploring the Cuban Point of View” to students. You may wish to have students work in groups, pairs, or individually. After students complete the exercise “Exploring the Cuban Point of View,” ask some to share their letter to President Kennedy with the class. You might want to discuss why Castro did not write a letter, and how Kennedy would have responded if he had.

3. New Revelations—Invite students to identify the important discoveries research-

ers have made since the end of the Cold War. Which discovery do students think is most significant? Why? Ask students how this knowledge, had it been known at the time, might have affected Kennedy’s decision-making.

4. Making Connections—Scholars of the time period have noted that the Cuban missile crisis would have been significantly less dangerous had the leaders of the three countries understood one another better at the time. Why might it be important for leaders to understand their adversaries? What other lessons can students learn from the events of the crisis and the subsequent research? Are there other events in U.S. or world history since the Cuban missile crisis to which lessons from the crisis may be applied?

Extra Challenges:

1. For homework, ask students to make a list of lessons from the crisis, and indicate how those lessons might be applied to events today. As a culminating exercise, ask students to write a letter to their Congressional representative or the White House (or to the leadership of another nation, as appropriate) explaining the lesson, and how it could be applied today.

2. The missile crisis and the fear of nuclear war had a profound effect on American popular culture. The films *Dr. Strangelove* and *Fail-Safe* are two examples of this. Bob Dylan’s song “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall” and others (e.g., Barry McGuire’s song “Eve of Destruction”) captured the mood in popular music. The poet Robert Lowell explored the same issue in the poem “Fall 1961.” Ask students to examine any of the above works of art. (There may be others you wish to point out.) What themes and ideas does the artist convey? How does the artist convey his or her ideas?

Study Guide—Epilogue

1. On October 20, President Kennedy decided on a _____ of Cuba by the U.S. Navy to prevent further shipments of _____ supplies to the island.
2. What two organizations did the United States turn to in response to the missiles in Cuba?
 - a.
 - b.
3. List two military steps the United States took in response to the missiles in Cuba.
 - a.
 - b.
4. True or False. In 1962, the United States knew for sure that there were nuclear warheads in Cuba.
5. True or False. The United States knew for sure that the Soviets exercised complete control over the missile sites in Cuba.
6. Fill in the Chart below about Khrushchev's two letters to Kennedy.

	Date	Soviet Proposals or Demands
First Letter		
Second Letter		

Name: _____

7. To which letter did Kennedy respond? Why?

8. List two points that Robert F. Kennedy made to Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin.

a.

b.

9. Fidel Castro sent a cable to Khrushchev on October 27, 1962. In it, the Cuban leader expressed his belief that the _____ would invade his island in the coming days and called on Khrushchev to launch _____ at the United States in response to the expected _____.

10. What were the contents of Radio Moscow's announcement regarding the missiles?

11. Since the end of the Cold War, participants and scholars have met several times to discuss the Cuban missile crisis. List three discoveries that came to light in these meetings.

a.

b.

c.

Exploring the Cuban Point of View

The Setting

Although critical letters went back and forth between Kennedy and Khrushchev during the missile crisis, Castro never wrote a letter to Kennedy. At the time, ExComm did not think the Cuban point of view was relevant.

Your Assignment

For this assignment, you are to imagine yourself in Castro's shoes and write to President Kennedy. In the letter you should explain your position on the following:

- Why Soviet missiles are in Cuba
- Why Cuba chose to ally itself with the Soviet Union
- The reasons behind each part of the five-part agreement

Your letter should outline the main elements shaping Castro's point of view of the United States and the crisis. You will be evaluated on your ability to make a compelling case—incorporating what you know about the history of Cuba, the history of U.S.-Cuban relations, and Castro's political philosophy. Below is an example of how you might begin your response.

Dear President Kennedy,

I would like to explain to you the reasons, as I see them, for the current difficulties between the United States and Cuba. Let me recount the long history of U.S. involvement in Cuba and its adverse effects on our small nation...

Tracing Forty Years

Objectives:

Students will: Analyze and interpret the events in U.S.-Cuban relations since the missile crisis.

Interpret a political cartoon.

In groups, describe an event in their own political cartoon.

Handout:

“Forty Years of U.S.-Cuban Relations”
(TRB-26)

Required Reading:

Students should have read “Forty Years of U.S.-Cuban Relations” in the student text (pages 34-37) and completed the “Study Guide—Optional Reading” (TRB-25).

In the Classroom:

1. Reviewing Significant Events—Ask students to identify the significant events in U.S.-Cuban relations since the end of the missile crisis. How did they affect U.S. attitudes towards Cuba? How did Castro’s relationship with Moscow evolve during the 1970s? What role did Ronald Reagan’s presidency have on Castro’s position in Central America and the

Caribbean? What impact did the end of the Cold War have on Cuba? How was Cuba forced to change in the 1990s?

2. Interpreting Political Cartoons—Distribute “Forty Years of U.S.-Cuban Relations” to students, or project the cartoon on an overhead projector. Ask students to consider the cartoon’s main message. What is it trying to say? From which perspective is the cartoon drawn, American or Cuban? You might also need to discuss the purpose of political cartoons and their common elements to give some background to students. The Library of Congress has a good introduction to political cartoon analysis: http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/political_cartoon/cag.html.

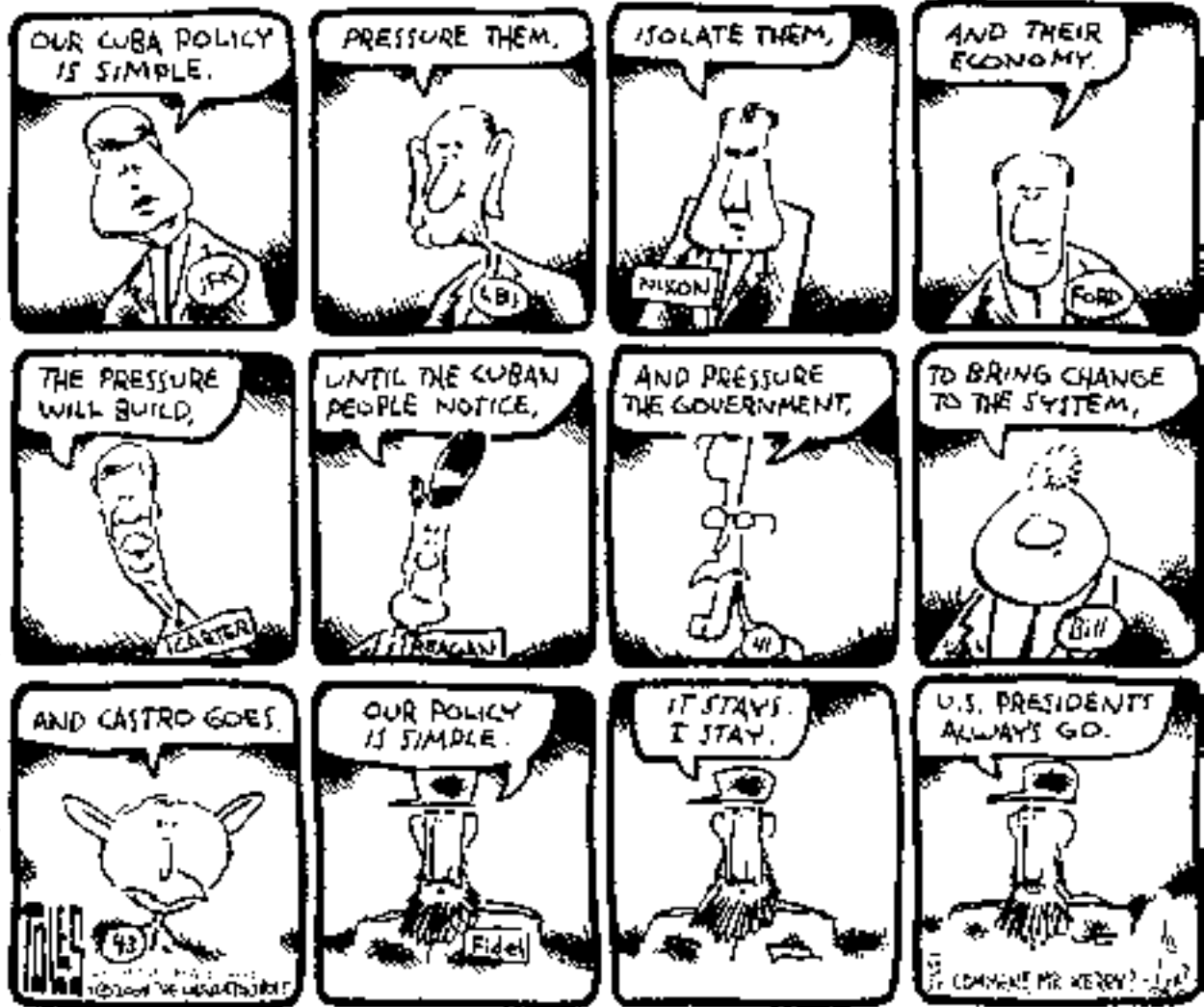
3. Visual Descriptions—Form student pairs or small groups. Ask students to design their own cartoon based on one event or issue raised in the reading. For instance, students might draw a political cartoon about Castro’s human rights record, or about the U.S. embargo of Cuba. Have students share their completed cartoons with the class. If you want to end up with a complete “cartoon history” of U.S.-Cuban relations, assign groups to specific time periods.

Name: _____

Study Guide—Optional Reading

1. Why did tensions continue between the United States and Cuba after the Cuban missile crisis?
2. How did Cuba's relationship with the Soviet Union help Cuba's economy over the years?
3. What steps was Castro forced to take following the fall of the Soviet Union?
4. Explain the purpose of the Helms-Burton Act.
5. Do you have any predictions for future U.S.-Cuban relations? For instance, what do you imagine might happen when Castro dies?

Forty Years of U.S.-Cuban Relations



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Key Terms

Introduction and Part I

nuclear weapons
 Cold War
 offensive weapons
 colonialism
 statehood
 trade
 expansion
 foreign aid
 jurisdiction
 empire
 federation
 colonial powers
 democracy
 foreign policy
 treaty
 annex
 industrial giant
 Western Hemisphere
 self-government
 empire
 nationalists
 military occupation
 stability
 “Good Neighbor Policy”

Part II

ally
 communism
 capitalism
 international relations
 NATO
 blockade
 sphere of influence
 conventional forces
 reconnaissance

pact
 paramilitary squads
 per capita
 inflation
 market
 guerrilla war
 factions
 human rights violations
 dictatorship
 suppressed
 exile
 domestic politics
 economic growth
 sabotage
 alliance
 arsenal

Epilogue

quarantine
 diplomacy
 aggressor
 superpower
 mobilization
 security
 missile gap
 deterrent
 nuclear capability
 nuclear imbalance

Optional Reading

weapons of mass destruction
 revolution
 economic embargo
 counter-insurgency
 private markets
 foreign subsidiaries

Issues Toolbox

Cold War:

The Cold War was the dominant foreign policy problem for the United States and Russia between the late 1940s and the late 1980s. Following the defeat of Hitler in 1945, Soviet-U.S. relations began to deteriorate. The United States adopted a policy of containing the spread of Soviet communism around the world, which led to, among other things, U.S. involvement in Vietnam. During this period, both the Soviet Union and the United States devoted vast resources to their military but never engaged in direct military action against each other. Because both the Soviet Union and the United States had nuclear weapons and were in competition around the world, nearly every foreign policy decision was intricately examined for its potential impact on U.S.-Soviet relations. The end of the Cold War in the early 1990s forced policymakers to struggle to define a new guiding purpose for their foreign policy.

Imperialism:

The policy of extending the rule of a nation over foreign countries as well as acquiring colonies and dependencies. At the end of the nineteenth century, supporters of U.S. imperialism used several different arguments to advocate their point of view. A school of thought led by naval Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan stressed the importance of naval power for the United States' physical and economic security. This meant that the United States would need to acquire and maintain naval bases around the globe. Others drew from Darwinian theory and suggested that there was a struggle between nations and people in which only the fittest would survive. They believed that the Anglo-Saxon race and particularly Americans were best-suited to spread their religious, cultural, and civic values throughout the world. Senator Alfred J. Beveridge of Indiana stressed the economic benefits of imperialism and believed that Americans were obligated to govern others who were not able to govern themselves.

Marxism-Leninism:

A form of socialism that for much of the twentieth century was in competition with capitalism. In their 1848 book, the *Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels outlined a form of scientific socialism in which the workers of the world would unite against capitalist exploitation. In the early twentieth century, the Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin adapted and added to Marx's ideas. Castro attempted to impose a Marxist-Leninist system on Cuba.

Nationalism:

A strong devotion and loyalty to the interest of one's country and people. Strong nationalist feelings were behind the U.S. decision to go to war with Spain and behind the revolution in Cuba.

Socialism:

Socialism is a political and economic system in which resources, property, and income are distributed subject to social control rather than individual or market forces.

Sovereignty:

The freedom of a state to govern itself without outside interference. Castro objected to UN inspections of the missile sites on the grounds that this would violate Cuban sovereignty.

The State:

The institutions and organizations of government. Different political systems have assigned different roles to the state. In Cuba, Castro believed that the power of the state should be absolute and that it should have control over all aspects of its citizens' lives in order to achieve socialism.

Making Choices Work in Your Classroom

This section of the Teacher Resource Book offers suggestions for teachers as they adapt Choices curricula on historical turning point to their classrooms. They are drawn from the experiences of teachers who have used Choices curricula successfully in their classrooms and from educational research on student-centered instruction.

Managing the Choices Simulation

A central activity of every Choices unit is the role play simulation in which students advocate different options and question each other. Just as thoughtful preparation is necessary to set the stage for cooperative group learning, careful planning for the presentations can increase the effectiveness of the simulation. Time is the essential ingredient to keep in mind. A minimum of 45 to 50 minutes is necessary for the presentations. Teachers who have been able to schedule a double period or extend the length of class to one hour report that the extra time is beneficial. When necessary, the role play simulation can be run over two days, but this disrupts momentum. The best strategy for managing the role play is to establish and enforce strict time limits, such as five minutes for each option presentation, ten minutes for questions and challenges, and the final five minutes of class for wrapping up. It is crucial to make students aware of strict time limits as they prepare their presentations.

Adjusting for Students of Differing Abilities

Teachers of students at all levels—from middle school to AP—have used Choices materials successfully. Many teachers make adjustments to the materials for their students. Here are some suggestions:

- Go over vocabulary and concepts with visual tools such as concept maps and word pictures.
- Require students to answer guiding questions in the text as checks for understanding.

- Shorten reading assignments; cut and paste sections.
- Combine reading with political cartoon analysis, map analysis, or movie-watching.
- Read some sections of the readings out loud.
- Ask students to create graphic organizers for sections of the reading, or fill in ones you have partially completed.
- Supplement with different types of readings, such as from trade books or text books.
- Ask student groups to create a bumper sticker, PowerPoint presentation, or collage representing their option.
- Do only some activities and readings from the unit rather than all of them.

Adjusting for Large and Small Classes

Choices units are designed for an average class of twenty-five students. In larger classes, additional roles, such as those of newspaper reporter or member of a special interest group, can be assigned to increase student participation in the simulation. With larger option groups, additional tasks might be to create a poster, political cartoon, or public service announcement that represents the viewpoint of an option. In smaller classes, the teacher can serve as the moderator of the debate, and administrators, parents, or faculty can be invited to play the roles of congressional leaders. Another option is to combine two small classes.

Assessing Student Achievement

Grading Group Assignments: Students and teachers both know that group grades can be motivating for students, while at the same time they can create controversy. Telling students in advance that the group will receive one grade often motivates group members to hold each other accountable. This can foster group cohesion and lead to better group results. It is also important to give individual grades for groupwork assignments in order to

recognize an individual's contribution to the group. The "Assessment Guide for Oral Presentations" on the following page is designed to help teachers evaluate group presentations.

Requiring Self-Evaluation: Having students complete self-evaluations is an effective way to encourage them to think about their own learning. Self-evaluations can take many forms and are useful in a variety of circumstances. They are particularly helpful in getting students to think constructively about group collaboration. In developing a self-evaluation tool for students, teachers need to pose clear and direct questions to students. Two key benefits of student self-evaluation are that it involves students in the assessment process, and that it provides teachers with valuable insights into the contributions of individual students and the dynamics of different groups. These insights can help teachers to organize groups for future cooperative assignments.

Testing: Research demonstrates that students using the Choices approach learn the factual information presented as well as or better than from lecture-discussion format. Students using Choices curricula demonstrate a greater ability to think critically, analyze multiple perspectives, and articulate original viewpoints. Teachers should hold students accountable for learning historical information and concepts presented in Choices units. A variety of types of testing questions and assessment devices can require students to demonstrate critical thinking and historical understanding.

For Further Reading

Daniels, Harvey, and Marilyn Bizar. *Teaching the Best Practice Way: Methods That Matter, K-12*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers, 2005.

Holt, Tom. *Thinking Historically: Narrative, Imagination, and Understanding*. The College Board, 1990.

Assessment Guide for Oral Presentations

Group assignment: _____

Group members: _____

Group Assessment	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Needs Improvement</i>	<i>Unsatisfactory</i>
1. The group made good use of its preparation time	5	4	3	2	1
2. The presentation reflected analysis of the issues under consideration	5	4	3	2	1
3. The presentation was coherent and persuasive	5	4	3	2	1
4. The group incorporated relevant sections of the background reading into its presentation	5	4	3	2	1
5. The group's presenters spoke clearly, maintained eye contact, and made an effort to hold the attention of their audience	5	4	3	2	1
6. The presentation incorporated contributions from all the members of the group	5	4	3	2	1
Individual Assessment					
1. The student cooperated with other group members	5	4	3	2	1
2. The student was well-prepared to meet his or her responsibilities	5	4	3	2	1
3. The student made a significant contribution to the group's presentation	5	4	3	2	1

Alternative Three Day Lesson Plan

Day 1:

See Day Two of the Suggested Five-Day Lesson Plan. (Students should have read Part II of the background reading and completed “Study Guide—Part II” before beginning the unit.)

Homework: Students should read “October 1962: The Moment of Decision” and the Options in Brief.

Day 2:

Assign each student one of the three options, and allow a few minutes for students to familiarize themselves with the mindsets of the options. Call on students to evaluate the benefits and trade-offs of their assigned options. How do the options differ in their assumptions about the problems and challenges presented by the missiles in Cuba? What are the main differences in the policy recommendations of the options? Which values should guide the direction of U.S. policy?

Homework: Students should read “Epilogue: On the Brink” and complete “Study Guide—Epilogue.”

Day 3:

See Day Five of the Suggested Five-Day Lesson Plan.

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U.S. Constitutional Convention ■ New England Slavery
War of 1812 ■ Spanish American War ■ Hiroshima
League of Nations ■ Cuban Missile Crisis
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